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PEACEMAKING CIRCLES & YOUNG REFUGEES:
BUILDING RESILIENCE IN GERMANY

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Preface

This paper in its original version was presented to the Department of Education and Psychology of the Freie Universität Berlin in the summer semester of 2013. The text has been edited and updated after partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree: “European Master in Childhood Studies and Children’s Rights”, in accordance with examination regulations at the time. New versions could be considered until January 2014.

“Peacemaking Circles & Young Refugees: Building Resilience in Germany” has been a personal project, one that was imbued with life thanks to some very special individuals:

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Christa Preissing and Manuela Ritz, my former supervisors, for their patient guidance, enthusiastic encouragement and helpful critique. Their valuable and constructive suggestions during the planning and the development of this work helped conceptualize this personal project. Their willingness to give their time so generously has been very much appreciated.

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Katrin Groninger demonstrated to me what it means to be a refugee in Germany by illustrating her experiences from refugee work. Without her I wouldn’t have gained ‘real’ insight into the practices of existent procedures.

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Finally, I would like to thank my wonderful family – my parents and two sisters – for their unremitting encouragement. Their constant commitment and support gave me the strength that I needed to carry this work to completion.

List of Abbreviations

ASD	Allgemeiner Sozialer Dienst
CEO	chief executive officer
Cp.	compare
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
Eds.	editors
e.g.	exempli gratia (for example)
Et al.	et alii
Et seq.	et sequens
Et seqq.	et sequentia
EU	European Union
Etc.	et cetera
GC	Geneva Convention
INA	International Academy for Innovative Education, Psychology and Economy
PhD	Doctor of philosophy
OPSI	Office for Psychosocial Issues
Pmc	Peacemaking circle
Prof.	Professor
PTSD	Posttraumatic stress disorder
s.n.	sine nomine
u.a.	unter anderem
Übers.	Übersetzung
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
URL	uniform resource locator
USA	United States of America
WHO	World Health Organization
ZFM	Zentrum für Flüchtlingshilfen und Migrationsdienste

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Introduction

Our wish for justice and equality highlights the variety of different forms of discrimination embedded in our society. In particular, we consider the meaning of morals and ethics to be essential components of social living together and to be general principles that guide human action. This, however, is an idealized conception of our social interactions; in reality, social interaction is also affected by prejudice and exclusion. The degradation of individuals and groups of people can be diverse in nature and can be attributed to a wide spectrum of characteristics and causes. One way in which degradation is manifested in Germany concerns non-nationals – and, above all, refugee children. The discourse on this form of culture-specific discrimination constantly lies at the centre of controversial debates. As it is not recognized as a form of discrimination by a majority of people, the isolation of refugee minors from communities is challenging to take action against. Indeed, their exclusion has achieved a sense of normality in our society. Since many people do not recognize the discrimination within existing institutional frameworks and even the discriminating potential of their own behaviour, the exclusion of young refugees often results as the outcome of an established automatism – mechanically, prohibitions are expressed, punishments are conducted, and exclusive regulations are enforced.

According to estimations made by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the total number of refugees worldwide comprises approximately 50 million people; roughly half of this total are minors¹. In accordance with estimations, the total annual number of unaccompanied minor refugees in Germany hovers between 3000 and 4000². These children are forced to leave their home countries and everything else that they had known due to physical threat, war, and poverty. Like adults, they fall prey to violence, oppression, and torture, and become victims of political, religious, and ethnic persecution. In order to protect their lives and to secure their future, these children come to a new country. Often, having lost their family or having been forced to leave them behind, these children are on their own. In a new country they are therefore dependent on help from others. During the last years, thousands of young refugees have come to Germany hoping for a more stable and humane life. But what can young people expect in their new home country? Officially, they are guaranteed all means that allow for appropriate and substantial protection. Unfortunately, the reality is different for most of them. The intellectual interest expressed by contact persons and institutions in Germany primarily refers to the potential influence of cultural imprints for social systems, rather than to the understanding of social living experiences and conditions of refugees in Germany. The overall discourse on the admission of refugees is always linked to perceptions of social problems and ‘abnormality’ due to cultural differences. Thus, problems of integration are conceived and treated as problems of ethnic ‘otherness’ – and young refugees are usually scapegoats for rising tensions in Germany.

Consequently, adolescents experience rejection on all political and social levels in the country. While refugee children can classify the terrible experiences in their home countries as experiences of war and violence, they are often unable to relate experiences in their new ‘home’ to the initial idealized image of Germany as a place of refuge and protection. The status of an illegal individual in a new country, coupled with the lack of belonging in a foreign environment and the feeling of personal worthlessness, has severe abasing effects. It is often hard for these children to identify resources which help them cope with an overwhelming number of challenges.

¹ Jordan 2000, 11

² cp. terre des hommes

A related question – one that is impossible to generalize – emerges from this discussion: are people born with a natural internalization of supportive factors, or are they just lucky to find sources of self-confidence and security in their particular environments? The concept of resilience lends some insight to this question. According to today's most popular perception of the term, resilience embraces a highly complex correlation between a child's character and his or her environment. The roots for the development of resilience arise from both the interior and exterior of a child and are, according to Wustmann, a dynamic, transactional process of exchange between child and environment³. Welter-Enderlin promotes resilience as a concept which implies the connection between social and individual capacities, providing the following description:

“Resilience refers to a person's ability to overcome crises in life through the use of personal and social resources. It allows individuals to transform life crises into opportunities for growth”⁴

Thus, Welter-Enderlin and other colleagues understand resilience as a process more than a status or state of being. Correspondingly, contemporary research has demonstrated that children can be resilient at any particular time, yet can be vulnerable at any other. The concept itself therefore embeds the idea of a specific way of acting and a particular way that people orient themselves – one that becomes especially meaningful in times of transition in an individual's life cycle. Due to continuing controversies over the definition of resilience, scholars like Rutter point out the dangers of misconceptions of the term, like studies that exclusively highlight genetics as a source of resilience while completely downplaying and neglecting social influences⁵. Rutter states that, in contrast to these separated approaches, a complex perspective on the topic – one that takes multiple, internal as well as external factors as sources of resilience into consideration – seems to be significant⁶. Refugee children must recognize their own competence for coping with problems and managing threatening living conditions; they must also recognize the resources that society has to offer. A supportive approach that involves the child and his or her community – and one that identifies lived social injustices – is thus necessary.

In a traditional understanding of justice, we think in terms of extremes: taking and giving, or doing harm and being punished – especially in cases of delinquency. But does it help a victim to put his or her perpetrator into prison? Perhaps this is the case for some individuals, but even for those who receive some satisfaction from seeing justice via imprisonment, the actual imprisonment process is just one part of a procedure of rebuilding justice. Punishment itself usually does not rebuild the victim's dignity, nor does it necessarily answer the victim's questions. The moment the perpetrator is taken away and imprisoned, all answers are imprisoned with him and completely inaccessible – perhaps forever. This form of punishment is satisfying for a limited period of time, but probably not for an entire life. If we look at our legal system and at our current ways of restoring justice, it becomes evident that “justice is often conceived as a battleground in which forces of good triumph by destroying forces of

³ Wustmann 2005, 193

⁴ Own translation, for original German see: (Welter-Enderlin & Hildenbrand 2012, 13).

⁵ cp. Rutter 2000

⁶ Aichinger 2011, 11

evil”⁷. A balance of justice is thus created through the defeat of the guilty party or even through harm that is caused to the perpetrator.

Restorative justice – a new movement born out of the desire to offer an alternative to the traditional understanding of the criminal justice system – emerged largely as a response to the acknowledged absence of justice for certain different parties of a crime. The approach of restorative justice attempts to recreate a balance after violations of human rights and legal foundations have taken place. Experts claim that this model is a form of justice which goes deeper in its understanding of fair trials and indeed touches human relations as a core element of the problem-solving process.

Peacemaking circles are one of several different processes and approaches rooted in the concept of restorative justice. In fact, they are considered to be a new opportunity – one in contrast to classic criminal justice mechanisms – that involves the creation of harmony, understanding and relationships. Circles acknowledge that the restoration of justice always requires a group on its own to assume “accountability to [the] self; to others, and to the wider community”⁸. In restorative justice theory, “one core insight is that the state has, in fact, stolen our conflicts.” Individuals and societies “no longer deal with breakdowns in [their] relationships, families, and communities”; instead they rely on others to ensure the restoration of justice⁹. But how reliable are these people who assert that they will consider what is the best for everyone, and how will they know what the best is – for me, for you, for us, for them? How can one single approach to justice be good for everyone? Restorative justice aims at giving back power to those people that have been harmed and that are simply part of their *own unique* conflict.

The use of peacemaking circles is not yet common in Germany. In the United States, though, they have already been successfully implemented for years. Circles that have been used in America usually involve young people and address issues such as “conflict, healing, street and gang [violence], and personal leaderships”¹⁰. There have been many cases where young immigrants have been involved in the Circle process in order to talk about their arrival in a new state and their personal experiences as refugees from war-torn countries. Most frequently, peacemaking procedures target the development of people’s ability to share and discuss critical concerns which have strong impacts on young people, such as “substance abuse, school, family issues, violence, [...] personal development, life dreams, and learning to live in a good way”¹¹. Circles find special application in the fields of primary and secondary prevention. While primary prevention focuses on avoiding concrete deficits and improving living conditions within families and communities, secondary prevention is related to specific interventional procedures that react to first symptoms and indicators for risk or endangerment. Indeed, Circles attempt to discover symptoms at an early stage so that their effective intervention can both heal past wounds and prevent future threats¹². Effective Circle work in the United States can be used as a template and model for restorative justice among refugee minors in Germany. In this paper, I will demonstrate the ways in which refugee minors are an ideal target group for peacemaking circles and why this particular form of restorative justice – one not yet

⁷ Boyes-Watson 2008, 4

⁸ Boyes-Watson, Circle of Accountability, 1

⁹ Boyes-Watson 2008, 117

¹⁰ Boyes-Watson 2002, 3

¹¹ Boyes-Watson 2002, 3

¹² Aichinger 2011, 23

implemented in Germany – could help remedy some of the pervasive problems we observe among a high-risk youth population.

It is important to highlight that I am not neutral in writing this paper. Although I attempt to remain as objective as possible and to study Circles critically from different angles, I must confess that I have somewhat of a predisposition. In the course of my research, Circle trainings, and interviews with experts, I developed a strong belief in the potential of peacemaking settings in conflict solving and humanitarian work. I recognize some of their setbacks but also see the opportunities the practices of Circles offer to individuals and their communities, and how Circles can introduce changes in our understanding of justice. Based on my experience in the United States with peacemaking circles and on stories shared by experts I would like to highlight the potential power of Circles and their possible future importance in the problem solving process on a rather personal level, as well as on a higher social level.

Methodologically, I will therefore begin by introducing the practices of peacemaking Circles and by highlighting their typical characteristics. I will also offer a historical background on the development of Circles outside of the Native cultures in which they were originally developed. Over the course of this introduction I would like to highlight the opportunities Circles offer in order to remedy power relations and hierarchies and their potential in harmonizing human relations and in reconciling disputes. Circles embrace unique features that allow groups to approach sensitive topics and help different parties reach agreements that do not strive for punishment or the exclusion of individuals. These qualities will be outlined as part of the first chapter.

In the second chapter I will evaluate the importance of the concept of resilience and the influence it has on our ability to cope with problematic issues and traumatic experiences. I will furthermore emphasize the meaning of individual capacities and outside resources internalized in human beings and their environment. The significance of resilience, protective factors, and risk factors in a person's life will make up an essential part of this chapter.

In the third step I will address a target population that I recognize as ready beneficiaries of Circles – namely, those who had to face moments of tremendous injustice and who were subject to lives full of exclusion and disadvantage. Only a few of these individuals will ever be compensated for the harm they had to experience. Thus, the third chapter will focus on young refugees in Germany. I will not emphasize one single group of young refugees in this work. Instead, based on the knowledge that they escaped from somewhere, we can assume that they all experienced violence, harm and loss in some form or another. It is not of central importance to this paper to define what kind of atrocities these refugees have been victims to in their home countries. I will instead focus on all of those coming to Germany and will concentrate on the conditions from which refugees possibly had to suffer in their place of origin, and on the trauma associated with coming to a new 'home'. In this paper, I do not wish to address refugees as our problem children, but rather as human beings who have been excluded from our society. I do not wish to focus on the problems they allegedly pose to communities, but rather want to highlight their roles as neglected members of society.

In the fourth chapter I will illustrate the work with refugee children in Circles and the framework the peacemaking process offers for ensuring resilience building among young people. To allow an appropriate examination of Circle work, I will point out fundamental qualities of peacemaking Circles which ensure that young refugees find the strength to develop in a positive way in spite of adverse conditions in themselves and in their communities.

Although I am convinced of the power that Circles bring to the process of restorative justice, I will point out challenges as well as chances that the peacemaking process offers to us in the conclusion – the fifth and final component of this thesis.

The information collected for this paper is based on literature I found in Germany and in the United States, as well as on expert interviews with professionals who are involved in refugee work, peacemaking circles, humanitarian work, victimology, trauma, and leadership programs. I have evaluated the results analytically according to their content and embedded them in my own perceptions and ideas. Some of the interviews can be found attached to this paper; others happened to be informal interviews, and the corresponding records are missing. Nevertheless, the insights gained are all integrated in this paper: some as direct quotes, but most as manifestations of the inspirational power that they had on me and on my understanding of the connection between peacemaking circles, resilience, and refugees.

Chapter I: Peacemaking Circles

“Listen, stories go in circles. They don’t go in straight lines. So, it helps if you listen in circles because there are stories inside and stories between stories and finding your way through them is as easy and as hard as finding your way home. And part of the finding is the getting lost. And when you’re lost, you really start to open up and listen”¹³.

Broadly speaking, peacemaking circles can be understood as places where borders are removed, where people temporarily abandon their social roles and positions, and as an arena for people to meet “simply as human beings”¹⁴. Peacemaking circles – often referred to as “Circles” – involve procedures which bring together people of different social classes, genders, ethnic backgrounds, ages, and even people with different professional backgrounds – allowing diverse groups of individuals to encounter one another and to interact as equals.

This generalized conception of a Circle lends some insight to its process and application; to more deeply understand and appreciate the concept, however, it is necessary to examine its particular facets in greater detail. Consequently, I should try to define what the term “peacemaking circle” truly implies. Let’s begin with the expression of “peace”: peace is widely recognized as a beneficial condition of silence and safety, one characterized by the absence of threats and anxieties. Conditions of peace can be ascribed to the inherent virtue of “peaceableness” and efforts made to ensure safety for everyone within a particular state, region, or territory. Accordingly, it is important to understand peace not simply as “the absence of war, but [...to acknowledge] the presence of justice”¹⁵. Where justice has been destroyed it has to be restored; in ideal scenarios, it is not just single members of a community that reconstruct justice, but the community as a *whole* via a collective ensemble of responsibilities. Only through joint efforts will the attempt to restore justice be successful and its affects long lasting. The process of restoring justice is embedded in the term of “peacemaking.” Peacemaking implies what its two components entail: the goal to make peace. The practice of peacemaking in Circles comprises proceedings “derived from Aboriginal and Native traditions” and can be regarded as “a way of communicating”¹⁶. As Boyes-Watson puts it, the peacemaking circle is a “form of social technology that enables us to tap capacities for wisdom, collective support, and creativity that lie dormant with us”¹⁷. Essentially, developing a Circle necessarily creates a sacred space – one where all human beings are equal and where individuals open themselves up to a new and dynamic process of conflict resolution.

A closer examination of Circles reveals three basic – yet integral – principles: (1) democracy, (2) fundamental values which regulate participants’ interaction, and (3) the absence of hierarchical structures. Social scientists therefore describe the procedure of a Circle as “a profoundly democratic, egalitarian, and spiritual values-led process” which can vary in its form, use and purpose; there are “talking circles, conflict circles, healing circles, family circles, court-related circles,” among others¹⁸. The degree of preparation and the number of participants will vary according to the issue and purpose of the Circle. However, all Circles have some features in common: they attempt to heal emotional

¹³ Boyes-Watson & Pranis 2010, 306

¹⁴ Boyes-Watson 2008, 58

¹⁵ Boyes-Watson 2008, 5

¹⁶ Boyes-Watson 2008, 58

¹⁷ Boyes-Watson 2008, 79

¹⁸ Healing the Wounds, 19.

wounds, they seek to restore justice and to help repair the dignity of victims involved, and they forge relationships based on mutual understanding. Boyes-Watson describes seven fundamental aspects of the Circle in "Peacemaking Circles and Urban Youth" and aptly captures some of their core characteristics¹⁹:

1. "A way to be" refers to the notion that by participating in a peace making circle, one commits him or herself to living by the values preached in the Circle – both during the experience and in other parts of his or her life;
2. To consider the Circle as "a sacred space," essentially solidifying the idea that the Circle and its rituals must be honoured by all participants;
3. The feature of "personal sharing" means that, based on the core principles of "generosity and belonging," participants open up in the Circle and share their own personal story in order to help others;
4. In a Circle participants learn to take on responsibilities for their actions, both during the experience and after it. Participants have to keep with guidelines that have been jointly developed and thereby learn to accept the Circle as a space of sincerity, respect, honesty, and seriousness. By virtue of this guideline, Circles create and assure the principle of "mutual accountability";
5. "Trusting the process" is a fundamental element of the peacemaking process: one of the most challenging aspects of the Circle is to accept that no one has control over either the procedure or its outcomes. Circles are always *individual* and *unique* in their implementation, in their processes, and in their result. It is the power of the collective group effort and experience that defines any particular Circle;
6. "Participation is voluntary" is a crucial reminder for all Circle participants. Involving oneself in the process must be considered as an open invitation; it is never forced, and individual agency is of the utmost importance. To pressure a person to take part in the procedure of a Circle would violate its values and render the process a failure;
7. Finally, participants must internalize and understand that Circles are always "about us": Circles are never about Circles, they are about their participants and the relationships created – they highlight peoples' "way to be." Coming together is an instrument which enables participants to find solutions for problems and that simultaneously manages to involve a large number of people in the process of healing.

By examining these seven fundamental characteristics, it becomes evident that the idea of "us" is crucial to the operation and success of Circles – a concept that is precious, and yet in some ways rarely employed in the modern world. Modern societies are often considered to be competitions wherein individuals compete against one another for resources and prestige; as a result, we often tend to work against one other rather than together. The Circle should therefore not simply be considered as a program or an ordinary meeting, but rather as a transformation to a new form of communication and

¹⁹ 2008, 84-86

being that takes place inside of a so called “sacred space” and that is designed to also be adapted outside of its boundaries²⁰. Circle researchers refer to this newly acquired form of acting as “behaving in a circle way.”

1 History

It is near impossible to completely strip our social, political and legal systems – the basic roots and structures of our everyday life – of the profound injustice and suffering that result from different forms of exclusion and structural violence. The procedures of Circles try to approach and ameliorate the suffering of injustice done to individuals who have been victims of society in different ways.

Peacemaking circles as a practice of restorative justice have their roots in “indigenous and non-Western societies”²¹. Traditionally, peacemaking circles developed from the desire to live together in peace and justice; they are the direct result of an acknowledged lack of justice for victims and offenders alike in our criminal justice system. Indigenous people understand the Circle as a worldview which embeds the ideals of inclusion, interconnectedness, balance, and equality²². Carolyn Boyes-Watson and other advocates of Circle work perceive this unique approach to peacemaking as a ‘present’ to people outside of indigenous culture, one designed to overcome injustice and exclusion. The sharing of Circle wisdom with non-native people is regarded as one of the most precious ‘gifts’ from indigenous tribes. At the same time this ‘gift’ brings along the responsibility to honor the Circle and its practices, to understand and convey the messages of its work, and to make use of it in a reflective way, so that in the end the Circle has the potential to become implemented in society as a practice from which a whole community can benefit. Nevertheless, the question remains: why did indigenous people decide to share their principles and beliefs of conflict solving with those human beings who “violently repressed” their people as well as their customs and practices “through the genocidal policies of Western governments over centuries”²³? Indigenous people have struggled to re-establish their tradition of peacemaking practices and have attempted to preserve their ancestors’ knowledge for coming generations. Many scholars describe this gift from native tribes to non-native people as a gesture of generosity and friendship. Perhaps the present embodied the hope to work together rather than against one other; perhaps it represents the belief that all human beings are equal. Sharing the practice of peacemaking circles also means sacrificing the sole claim to their use: the practice no longer belongs to a single group and, much like the ideas underlying the whole process, it does not exclude other groups. Furthermore, authors have speculated that the introduction of Circles might be a careful attempt to transform non-indigenous nations into less hierarchical and oppressive places in order to create new understandings of justice, equality, peace and interpersonal relationships. However, it cannot be denied that peacemaking circles have undergone a radical change and transformation over time as they have adapted to new cultures with particular goals and demands. Robert Yazzie, chief justice Emeritus of the Navajo Supreme Court, explains:

²⁰ Boyes-Watson 2002, 8

²¹ Boyes-Watson 2008, 3

²² Boyes-Watson et al. 2010, 31

²³ Boyes-Watson 2008, 12

"In the time of legend, Navajos slew monsters. Today, Navajos face new monsters... domestic violence, child abuse, and neglect... alcoholism... these problems are today's monsters... which get in the way of a successful life"²⁴.

A successful implementation of the Circle outside of native tribes thus requires adaptation to new circumstances and modern problems, in order to "[become] truly useful in one's own home"²⁵.

2 The Setting of Circles

For many years Circles have proved to be a useful practice, embedded in the approach of restorative justice, in the fight against 'modern monsters'. By providing fertile ground for inclusion and mutual acceptance, Circles have supported the strengthening of communities and their members in different parts of the world. In comparison to other approaches of conflict resolution there are several distinctive features which define Circles. These include visual aspects as well as characteristics regarding behaviour and the mutual treatment of participants. In order to grant security and respect in Circles, they involve ritualized procedures that must be respected. In the following I would like to highlight essential criteria of a typical peacemaking circle:

2.1 Visual Composition

As the name implies, people sit in a circle when they join the peacemaking process. The seating in a Circle is not to be overlooked as an important component of the peacemaking procedure: it allows all participants to face one another and it creates an open space for discussion. All participants are further granted inclusion through the round shape of seating arrangements, so that the setting itself abolishes hierarchical structures. Accordingly, even in the composition of Circles one can easily recognize patterns of inclusion: everyone who is present is *equally* included. A Circle has no observers; this added dimension of "being watched" would manipulate the procedure and would change people's behaviour – and, accordingly the outcome of the Circle²⁶. The shape of the circle consequently highlights the interconnectedness of all involved and participants create one united force that seeks to achieve good for the whole – every word, every issue, and every individual voice is of high value²⁷.

2.2 The Absence of Hierarchies

Hierarchical structures are present in every realm of society: they shape our living conditions and separate people; they influence behaviour and treatment of others and impact our daily interactions. Worthiness is usually related to power: individuals seek power in order to demonstrate that they are respected and recognized as valued members of a group or community. Those "who suffer under the rituals of hierarchy – as young people routinely do – appreciate the structure of the Circle, precisely because of its practice of an egalitarian worldview"²⁸. Circles deny the idea of exercising power over other people and instead embrace the idea of *shared* power, thereby helping us overcome hierarchies and social rankings; personal wealth, social status, education, ethnicity,

²⁴ Boyes-Watson 2008, 23

²⁵ Boyes-Watson 2008, 13

²⁶ Boyes-Watson 2008, 81

²⁷ Boyes-Watson et al. 2010, 32

²⁸ Boyes-Watson 2008, 81

gender, age, and positions in society are stripped bare and are not of interest in Circles. In a healthy and positive way people can hold each other accountable for their wrongdoings and meet eye-to-eye. At the same time the Circle offers a safe space for everyone. This form of safety protects individuals from all forms of coercion: Circles guarantee that no one is forced to take part, even if it is widely believed that certain individuals would benefit from participation. We tend to think that we know better than other people what is good or harmful for them, especially with children and youth – that is why “[we] must be mindful of ways to keep the invitation open”²⁹. By forcing someone to take part in a Circle, we necessarily undermine the true essence of the process – namely, the true empowerment of people and the absence of hierarchies. According to the values of Circles it is necessary to respect individual autonomy, especially with those who are least likely to consider themselves ‘free agents’ in the larger world outside the Circle. In peacemaking processes all parties are protected by a framework that respects common values; everyone reflects on his or her own mistakes and understands him or herself as a responsible component of community, one that can help shape the future in a positive way.

2.3 Justice through Equality

In our everyday life we routinely participate in “rituals of power”³⁰: rituals that establish and strengthen hierarchical structures, ones that hold us back ‘where we belong’, which restrict access to particular places because of who we are, and which shape our relationships to the human beings around us. Peacemaking circles are usually born out of these forms of division and rejection, but while we routinely participate in rituals that create an environment out of individuality, Circles try to establish a sense of ‘togetherness’. The Circle serves to reduce and ultimately dispel negative feelings and attitudes through an exchange of ideas, experiences, thoughts and wishes. The basic principles of peacemaking circles ensure that all participants find a space of being together and a state that reaches our imagination of true justice – “the justice of being heard, the justice of being respected, the justice of hearing others speak from their hearts”³¹. Young people in particular are subject to either the feeling that justice is absent from their lives, or to an actual absence of justice. Children and youth often do not have the opportunity to share their opinions; their ideas and thoughts are often simply not appreciated and they as part of a community are not accepted and respected in the same way adults are. This phenomenon – namely, a lack of justice – is a reality in every child’s life. Within the Circle, however, children learn what it means to be valued as a full member of a collective, and can learn firsthand what it means to have an influential voice – one that is listened to.

2.4 A Sense of Belonging

Although we are in many ways subject to and even accustomed to a social order in which exclusion is the norm, Circles seek to teach us principles of inclusiveness. On these grounds, one distinctive feature in a Circle is that “[t]here is no back row, no alphabetical order, no strategic placement such that inclusion is guaranteed for everyone”³². Society has many processes that normalize those who don’t conform to the norm – those who are most abnormal. People usually do not want to address the sources of problems; instead,

²⁹ Boyes-Watson 2002, 11

³⁰ Boyes-Watson 2008, 80

³¹ Boyes-Watson 2008, 3

³² Lewis 2002, 6

they try to simply remedy visible *outcomes*, which are often identified in the form of an ill-bred person. Circles, by contrast, represent an arena where people are embraced as part of a community: they involve ways to negotiate solutions and agreements and to rebuild dignity on all sides. Circles furthermore strengthen the fundamental believe in the inclusion of all people as profoundly 'good' human beings. Boyles calls this the "core or true self," and describes it as "good, wise, and powerful"³³. This core self can be damaged by society, but can never be destroyed by anyone.

2.5 Healing Function of Circles

What all forms of Circles have in common is their healing function: "[w]hen people share their story and experiences in a setting where they are respectfully listened to, they heal"³⁴. Circles strive to be emotionally safe environments that offer mutual respect and trust, and where people can begin to show parts of themselves that have been unknown both to others and – importantly – unknown to *themselves*. The healing process of Circles is especially visible and true when sharing experiences of trauma. By revealing stories, anxieties, or thoughts people begin to see things, people, and even themselves in a different light. The act of sharing is simultaneously a gesture of generosity – a gift from one person to another. However, no one can be forced to share, not even to participate in the Circle against his or her own will. The forced implementation of a Circle and required participation would violate the values and indeed the very success of the process.

3 Rituals and Ceremonies

Although there are many different forms of Circles, each particular type involves a few fundamental elements and procedures that characterize Circle work more broadly. Some common elements include the use of a talking piece, an introduction through a ritualized opening and closing, and on a more theoretical level, the collective search for shared values that must be followed throughout the process of a meeting. All of these methods are used in order to enable participants to be "in a good way with [them]selves and others," to take the Circle and its rules seriously and to remind that respect for all members is of the utmost concern³⁵. Ceremonies we participate in on a daily basis emphasize – whether intentionally or not – hierarchical structures. Especially young people constantly face subordination and oppression. Rituals used in a Circle, by contrast, function as guarantors of equality and mutual respect. They highlight the start of being in a different way and aim to achieve balanced insight, such that the values practiced in the Circle might be carried beyond the event itself. Circle ceremonies mark the entrance into a new sphere, one in which everyone is treated simply as a human being with individual emotions, values, and opinions; circles highlight the shift from the normal to the 'better' – being better to oneself, to others, and to the whole community. Accordingly, in Circles it is believed that individuals will present the best of themselves.

There are different ceremonies that highlight particular values which each Circle embeds. According to Boyes-Watson six specific rituals can be identified³⁶. The different rituals are expanded upon in the following section:

³³ Boyes-Watson et al. 2010, 14

³⁴ Boyes-Watson 2002, 5

³⁵ Boyes-Watson 2008, 84

³⁶ 2008, 87-90

3.1 “The Role of the Keeper”

A keeper should not be mistaken for a mediator or a leader. Instead the keeper functions more as a moderator and follower of protocol who must react to the group's mood, and who correspondingly decides on practical concerns like breaks, the end and the start of a Circle, and topic changes. Importantly, however, the keeper never controls the process; he is an equal member of the group. Nevertheless, one thing is certain: the role of the keeper is always an emotional one.

The keeper – sometimes referred to as the facilitator – is responsible for making sure that the Circle is honoured as a sacred place, one that is respected by all participants. He or she ensures that everyone sticks to the values and guidelines developed by the group as an entirety such that an overall atmosphere of safety is constantly maintained. Further responsibilities of the facilitator include: “assisting people in getting ready for the Circle; planning the Circle; arranging the physical space; preparing an opening, a closing, and a set of questions; welcoming people; and maintaining the rituals and tone during the Circle”³⁷. Every circle requires careful preparation and planning no matter what its specific content, goals, and intensity might be. It is essential that participants and keeper alike come prepared, and furthermore, that they take part in a follow-up after the circle itself in order that everyone arrives and leaves with a positive mindset. Ultimately, every single participant should be ready to make his or her contribution to the conflict or problem in question. Circles therefore involve guiding questions in order to stimulate discussions and to encourage individuals to share their stories. Circles are employed to encourage participants to take part in the process of building trust and relationships and to develop team spirit through lively conversation. Any individual – as long as he or she is familiar with Circle work – can be a keeper; nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that “keepers neither control the process nor are responsible for its outcome”³⁸.

In the case of unforeseen challenges the keeper will remind participants of the common values and guidelines established earlier before continuing with the discussion. Breaks can be helpful in the case of emotional tension. In delicate situations “[i]t is ok to ask for help from the Circle” as a keeper³⁹.

3.2 “Talking Piece”

The use of a talking piece is an essential part of every Circle. It allows everyone who holds it to speak and to be listened to, but also allows for participants to pass it along and to be silent; it is strictly forbidden to interrupt another person or to pass over anyone. While holding the talking piece, one is guaranteed the right to talk without interruption, without any obligation to hurry. For some it is difficult to realize the value of one's own words and to sum up the courage to express them to an audience, but for many it is even more difficult to just listen. The talking piece highlights that every individual's voice is valued and important for the group and their desired outcome. This effective tool maintains equality between the participants and empowers everyone to share ideas, thoughts and experiences. By doing so, “[t]he levelling power of the talking piece opens up a space where young people can participate fully and equally”⁴⁰. A talking piece moves clockwise through members of the Circle and helps participants honor every word that is

³⁷ Boyes-Watson 2008, 89

³⁸ Boyes-Watson 2008, 89

³⁹ Boyes-Watson et al. 2010, 35

⁴⁰ Boyes-Watson 2008, 94

spoken in the Circle equally. With this in mind, its main function is to “regulate the dialogue of the participants”⁴¹. The talking piece thus highlights the value of everyone who is present and distributes responsibility of sticking to the regulation of a talking piece from the keeper to the group.

3.3 “Openings and Closings”

Openings and closings are used in order to emphasize the transition from an ordinary meeting to a special form of gathering – one with a special purpose. Opening and closing ceremonies are essential components of every Circle and mark the start and end of an extraordinary experience of coming together. These rituals at the start and at the end are intended to help participants stay focused and to remind them of the values and the intentions of a Circle through music, poetry, silence, and – in fact – anything else that serves as a form of ritual. These elements of Circles emphasize the invitation offered to participants “to drop the ordinary masks and protections they may wear that create distance from their core self and the core self of others”⁴².

3.4 “Values and Guidelines”

Shared values are, in particular, intended to establish and maintain a stable foundation of trust, understanding, and respect. Furthermore, these values facilitate a peaceful confrontation of the concerns that brought people participating in a Circle together. Participants accordingly brainstorm values in order to determine guidelines that underline how they wish to be treated, and “what each participant needs in order to feel ‘safe’”⁴³. Respectful teamwork, however, must be ensured; therefore “people [typically] raise values such as honesty, respect, openness, caring, courage, patience, and humility”⁴⁴.

These guidelines for behaviour and mutual treatment in Circles highlight the democratic approach of the peacemaking process and the intention to achieve steady participation among participants. In everyday life it is easy to forget to articulate how we want to be treated by others, to explain what is good or bad for us, and to express what is or is not possible for us. Young people more than others are subject to rules and guidelines that have been imposed on them by adults. In Circles young people receive an equal opportunity to develop their own framework of rules and values. In Circles they decide if they are capable of sticking exclusively to the established rules, and whether or not the Circle will work. The Circle is – so to speak – “a way of bringing people together to talk from [their] deepest values and [their] best selves,” wherein individuals are enabled to take on responsibility for their decisions and actions, and where people hold each other accountable⁴⁵. Responsibility, though, always goes hand-in-hand with the desire and expectation to be treated a certain way and with the knowledge that the only person one can change is oneself. Finding common or individual values in the Circle group first paves the way for discussion, but also involves intense deliberation about the meaning of guidelines and how to effectively follow them. Circles tend to go in the right direction thanks to group dynamics and the participants’ trust in a positive development of the Circle’s outcome. So, indeed, it often takes time until all participants have agreed on the possibility of fulfilling and sticking to the proposed values. In the end, however,

⁴¹ Boyes-Watson et al. 2010, 33

⁴² Boyes-Watson et al. 2010, 32

⁴³ Boyes-Watson 2008, 88

⁴⁴ Boyes-Watson et al. 2010, 30

⁴⁵ Boyes-Watson 2008, 3

participants create an environment and atmosphere that embraces the idea of reciprocity to a high degree: as you are to me, so I am to you – what you give to the circle, you will in return receive.

3.5 “Creating Consensus”

Creating consensus is part of the process of finding guidelines. Circles, of course, have no leader, and the group must thus collectively agree on a way for participants to treat one another. By finding and establishing values, participants start to shape the Circle – they design a space where they can be treated the way they wish to be treated and return the same to others. Guidelines are accordingly not imposed on the group; in fact, they strengthen a form of group identity. Past experiences with Circles demonstrate that even challenging situations can be readily resolved by the collective and shared values the group establishes:

“[w]hat I have found when I have circles with young people is that when people don’t hold the guidelines, there is always somebody else to be like “Well, we came up with this...” and they hold each other accountable”⁴⁶.

As a result, the Circle will be strong enough to stand problems, challenges, and even imperfections if every participant is loyal to their shared guidelines.

All in all, the processes of finding values, engaging in team work and creating consensus in the collective are crucial foundations of Circle work that help guarantee the establishment of a secure place.

3.6 “Trusting the Circle”

The belief in peacemaking processes, in the people involved and in the teamwork of the group is essential to ensure the success of Circles. The willingness to share thoughts and to be held accountable among Circle groups is compelling evidence of this belief. In order to motivate participants to actively participate in the Circle it is crucial to build trust in the benevolence of the procedure. All participants have to understand that everything they say is valuable for potential outcomes and that they, as individuals, will neither be judged by others for their contributions nor abandoned by the rest of the group.

Nonconformity in society is frequently frowned upon. Social institutions have little tolerance for the mistakes that “[... people] make. [...] When adults present themselves as finished products of perfect behaviour, many young people – who may already feel isolated and alone – feel overwhelmed by their own mistakes”⁴⁷. Usually, young offenders or victims are not even given the opportunity to take on responsibility or to recognize the harm they have done to themselves and to others; they are rarely able to even uncover and explore their buried better self. Rather than allow active self-betterment, our legal and social systems are predominately concerned with punishment and conformity. Circles, by contrast, “teach that all human beings make mistakes and that, with courage and determination, it is possible to begin again and make things right”⁴⁸.

⁴⁶ Victor in Boyes-Watson, Circle of Accountability, 2

⁴⁷ Boyes-Watson 2008, 112

⁴⁸ Boyes-Watson 2008, 131

4 Variety of Circle Approaches

Circles include some core elements in their work that distinguishes them from the characteristics of other processes. However, variation is still possible within the Circle process – for example, the talking piece might be temporarily suspended in order to allow more free-flowing discussion and dialogue. Thus, no matter what the technique and approach, it is most important that certain goals are achieved: individuals should start to recognize themselves in someone else's dreams, fears, hopes, wishes, experiences – and should accordingly change their attitudes towards one other. Participants must recognize that they can find common values despite different personal backgrounds. Circles are always flexible frameworks, which differ according to the dynamics of the group; in most cases outcomes might therefore be different than expected. In Circles it is important to take advantage of the moment, to react to actions, and to be spontaneous.

5 Circles and their Scope of Application

Modern societies have a “powerful tendency to blame the victim. Consequently, it doesn't surprise that young people who face the awesome “monsters” of modern life often find themselves being treated as if they themselves were the monsters”⁴⁹. Youth are often blamed by troubled older generations for the dysfunctions of community life and society as a whole and for changes in the social order that are perceived to be negative. They are therefore often regarded as threats to the capacity for peaceful living together and, by consequence, need to be in some way fixed. As a result of this logic, according to Boyes-Watson, “youth becomes the target of massive adult intervention to control, minimize, repress, and repair their many perceived deficits”⁵⁰. Circles teach us to recognize young people as sources of power and competence instead of immediately reverting to acts of repression; they teach us that it is our responsibility not to oppress the children that Boyes-Watson describes, but to empower them.

The Circle presents a starting point for this process of empowerment. It produces a place where the notions of accountability and competence can be practiced through the enacted values of a Circle – values like “generosity and belonging”⁵¹. In particular, members of a Circle start to develop a genuine sense of responsibility and mindfulness for their surroundings and themselves through strong and trustful relationships. Over the course of this development, individuals become more reflective, independent, and caring. They learn to understand the impact of their words and actions and recognize that they can contribute ideas and knowledge. Above all, children begin to realize that everyone is the master of his or her own *subjective* perspective. What accountability means in the context of Circles is that young people begin to learn and adapt. More importantly, they apply their learning to the life that waits outside the Circle. By sharing experiences and thoughts, young people begin to develop a vision of their own future lives – of how to lead them in a more fulfilling way, and of what is truly important to them. Human beings need this vision of themselves in order to start shaping their lives in meaningful and positive ways, in order to know who they want to become, and to gain inspiration for a ‘better’ life. As a result, children become autonomous individuals in communities with an unprecedented sense of agency.

⁴⁹ Boyes-Watson 2008, 30

⁵⁰ 2008, 30

⁵¹ Boyes-Watson 2008, 110

Circles furthermore promote skills that enable children to view themselves positively by recognizing themselves as full and valued members of a community, and by understanding themselves as part of a group. Thus, they are enabled to work together with others and know how to establish strong relationships. Particularly “[c]hildren and youth who are raised without strong parental and adult support and who continue to be impacted by poverty, violence, racism, and other sources of disruption and dysfunction have a tremendous need for relationships with reliable and caring adults”⁵². While acting independently in Circles children also recognize their potential in a group: their relationships show them who they can be and what they can achieve⁵³. Without strong and positive relationships, children often lack a vision for their life and stop believing in the potential for change – they require power from outside to find the power in themselves. In Circles, adolescents can build the groundwork for these strong and positive relationships and create visions of themselves with the help of the community. By learning to show respect, love, and empathy to others, adolescents develop emotional literacy and generate core elements of resilience.

Circle followers have a deep trust that Circles will bring both positive strong relationships and the wisdom to help overcome challenges. According to scholars, Circles might thus be particularly effective when applied to work with adolescents, in child welfare, in educational programs, and in many other forms of prevention programs. Historically, Circles have been employed to address the development of a person’s resilience building, including his or her emotional awareness along with additional developmental issues. The goal is to enable people to envision themselves as a better future being; put otherwise, individuals learn to be clear about what they do and do not want, about what they do and do not need. In order to achieve this, participants must recognize and acknowledge their own pain and worries and must receive advice on how to overcome challenging future situations and circumstances – much like those situations that have limited positive doing and behaviour in the past.

⁵² Boyes-Watson et al. 2010, 8

⁵³ Boyes-Watson 2008, 124

Chapter II: Resilience

Many children find themselves confronted with insecurities, stress, and difficult life conditions. Those who depend on regularity, clear arrangements and frameworks, certainty, secure conditions, and instructions often find themselves troubled. However, many of these children develop in very positive ways despite risks in their development due to various natural phenomena. In recent years, the phenomenon of “strong” children and the development of their coping mechanisms has been discussed in relation to the term “resilience.” According to Wustmann (2005), resilience describes:

“the ability to successfully handle burdensome life situations and negative consequences of stress, not to buckle in the face of challenges. Resilience therefore refers to children’s and adolescents’ capability to resist biological, psychological and psychosocial developmental risks”⁵⁴

Aichinger highlights that 80% of children and youth are able to flourish in their lives and to cope with challenging situations⁵⁵. Where, we might ask, does this leave the other 20%? The majority of young people are raised to be healthy and self-confident, yet growing up today still means being at risk. Consequently, a great number of children suffering from poverty, violence, and marginalization fail in some ways to cope with risks and challenges. In particular, low social status and poverty have their effect on a young person’s development; low levels of education, social injustices, and a lack of training qualification can, for example, cause mental vulnerability, illness, insecure life situations, and can even exacerbate experiences of marginalization. According to Wilkinson, a society that breaks into pieces due to social and material differences loses social cohesion and its resources of solidarity. Rosa confirmed in her study that especially those adolescents who live on the margins of society are affected, highlighting the psychological dimensions of marginalization⁵⁶:

“Greater injustice implies a psychological burden that affects the wellbeing of society at large. A decisive factor in this context is no longer only a person’s material life standard, but also a consequence of psychosocial life quality”⁵⁷

Accordingly, risk factors in resilience building are usually caused by a lack of basic material, emotional, physical, and mental needs. If these needs are not met in some way, a sense of personal worthlessness, pessimism and hopelessness might ensue. In order to overcome problems and to cope with challenging situations young people should internalize specific abilities and capabilities. Lerner and his team call these features the “5C”s of positive development⁵⁸:

1. The first C aims at an improvement of the social, educational, cognitive, and professional competencies of children. Young people who are more resilient tend to be emotionally literate and are therefore better able to recognize their feelings and to express them in an appropriate manner⁵⁹.

⁵⁴ Own translation, for original German see: (Aichinger 2011, 26)

⁵⁵ 2011, 18

⁵⁶ Aichinger 2011, 21

⁵⁷ Own translation, for original German see: (Wilkinson 2001, XIX)

⁵⁸ cp. Lerner 2007

⁵⁹ Boyes-Watson et al. 2010, 341

2. The second C focuses on the strengthening of trust, the increase of self-esteem, self-knowledge, self-confidence, and identity, and the belief in a positive future. Children have to forge a personal identity through individual assimilation within a society. According to Keupp, the basis of all these resources is a primordial trust in life.
3. The third C comprises the stimulation and support of social relations – namely, the development and stabilization of relations between children and other persons and institutions. People manage to be resilient and to defy the past against expectations through the help and support of community and close persons. Through relationships people get a better sense of themselves. The ability to give love and to receive love and to see oneself as a competent and important member of a community who can make independent decisions helps a person start to become a reasonable giver, taker, helper, and lover.
4. The fourth C concentrates on gaining self-control, diminishing behavior that causes adverse health effects, respecting and maintaining cultural and social norms and rules, and consolidating a sense of justice and spirituality.
5. The fifth C includes the development of care and empathy, in particular the promotion of children's ability to put themselves in the position of someone else.

Thus, according to Lerner's depiction, every individual has the capacity to be resilient *even if* he or she might face certain hardships or might have certain deficiencies; self-determination, autonomy, and the gain of social resources through networking help build resilience. We currently understand resilience to be something that is gained over the course of growing up and in the context of a child's interaction with his or her environment⁶⁰. In particular, experts highlight that resilience should not be mistaken for a character trait; it is rather a dynamic process, a specific way of acting and of orientation. Accordingly, resilience should not be seen as an inherent, steady personality trait. Every life involves miserable times and crises where the importance of resilience can be illuminated. It is wrong to look at people at one single point in time and to draw broader conclusions about the rest of their lives. Resilience does not imply lifelong steady immunity, but can vary depending on time and context.

1 The Importance of Resilience for Children

In our society we usually tend to see and hear those people more who are of higher position in our social hierarchy. We see positions and titles, and tend to forget about the human being behind the status. Generally, people are defined by their successes and failures, not by their individual character. Especially children suffer from being unheard and unseen by adults in the public and private realms of society, given that adolescents are usually considered as a "troublesome population [that has to be] suppressed, controlled, forcibly removed, or even eliminated"⁶¹. Young people frequently have trouble feeling that they are valued members of a community and that their commitments are appreciated. Through a sense of belonging and their acknowledgement as important vehicles by others, young people begin to value themselves, to take on responsibility, and to act in a caring and self-disciplined way. Mutual acknowledgement in a group is essential since people start to understand themselves as important parts of community.

⁶⁰ cp. Rutter 2000

⁶¹ Boyes-Watson 2008, 92

To be accepted and even more respected as unique individuals makes us accept and respect ourselves; doing good and being good makes sense because it is valued. Thus, the “extent to which young people in our society feel excluded and invisible is most evident by the difference it makes when they are truly recognized and heard by others”⁶².

Oppressive social structures often deny young people from establishing factors of resilience through strong relationships or outside support. As a result, children have little confidence in their competencies and struggle to become strong and autonomous members of a community. Characteristics of resilience include acquiring age-specific competencies and the ability to cope with age-specific developmental tasks. It is our society’s responsibility to provide a space “[f]or young people to be seen and heard, [and where] adults must see and listen” in order to assure that children can adopt and learn protective qualities⁶³. An ideal breeding ground for resilience is thus an environment in which children are accepted as equal and respected members, so that their positive development can be ensured; those characteristics in children that are encouraged will continue to be strengthened in a sort-of positive feedback loop.

The topic of resilience – which includes protective and risk factors – is complex in contemporary debates, and many experts therefore demand further exploration. Unfortunately, a cross-cultural perspective with the focus on migrant and refugee children has been neglected so far, according to authors like Emmy Werner. Although children with migrant backgrounds are exposed to biological and psychosocial risks to a greater extent than peers who, for example, grew up under more economically secure conditions, they are rarely of central interest in social and professional discourse. Werner in particular demands more research on the personal dispositions of migrant children and the sources of social support that could sustain resilient factors among this group⁶⁴.

⁶² Boyes-Watson 2008, 91

⁶³ Boyes-Watson 2008, 93

⁶⁴ Welter-Enderlin et al. 2012, 40

Chapter III: Refugee Children

“We belong to the earth. All things are connected, like the blood which unites one family. We do not weave the web of life. We are but a strand in the web of life. What we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are connected.”⁶⁵

The first article of the Geneva Convention on Refugees defines a refugee as a person who:

“owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group of political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it”⁶⁶

This definition emphasizes that the motives for refugees to leave their home country are complex. Usually, the persons concerned make a decision based on several reasons which are often overlapping and cannot be clearly separated. Frequently, these reasons are embedded in political, economic, or social areas of life and force refugees to leave their country. Notwithstanding, the explanation offered by the Geneva Convention has been matter of international debate for the last years. The UNHCR in fact recommended an expansion upon this definition. The UNHCR describes the situation of refugees as “hochkomplizierte Mischung von Zwängen und eigenen Entscheidungen” which has not been captured in its entirety by existing interpretations⁶⁷.

An ideal definition also requires the consideration of nuanced forecasts on what kind of conflicts and confrontations are to be expected in the country of migration – usually, these forecasts of past experiences in the home country and follow-up issues are separated from one another. As a result, prevailing discussions address the desire for a holistic definition of refugees by including the challenges of integration, social segregation, and the development of so-called parallel societies in exile. In the debate’s framework, there becomes visible a dominant and biased perception of the problems regarding ethicizing imputation and its significance for further integrative approaches⁶⁸.

In the following I would like to focus on Germany in its role as a country of migration: what exactly can young refugees expect – and what might they have to cope with – upon entering Germany?

1 Discrimination

Refugees in Germany are a high-risk group for subjection to social and political discrimination. They, by nature, were not welcomed in their previous homes and likely do not fit the social norms of their new one. By consequence, refugees are victims of a natural order of selection in society and are subject to exclusion and discrimination on a daily basis. They are, more than almost any other group, disenfranchised in every

⁶⁵ Boyes-Watson et al. 2010, 306

⁶⁶ UNHCR 1967, 14

⁶⁷ Jordan 2000, 15

⁶⁸ Jordan 2000, 8

possible respect of life. Indeed, in German debates the issue of unequal rights and disadvantages due to social differentiation leaves a bitter aftertaste.

The integration of young refugees in Germany into a foreign system – one with foreign norms, rules, and standards of conduct – is complicated due to extreme societal marginalization. Structural, material, and symbolic processes of exclusion and integration significantly influence the quality of life and future prospects of young refugees⁶⁹. For many, the result is a sense of uprooting and strangeness coupled with feelings of despair, loneliness, neglect, and invisibility. Hoerder et al. discuss the correlation between the threat posed by social and cultural heterogeneity – here, by increased migration – and the desire among nationals to create a homogeneous ‘we’ and a standardized community⁷⁰. People with different ethnic backgrounds have tremendous trouble integrating and blending into a standardized homogenous national community. In spite of the national desire to discourage heterogeneity, it is evident that many young refugees do not conform to norms and regulations as expected and are consequently stigmatized as inferior, neglected, inadaptatable, aggressive, or simply ‘not normal’. According to Boyes-Watson, individuals fitting these descriptions “lack eligibility for all kinds of programs and privileges”⁷¹. Thus, after escaping loss, damage, and constant deficit in their original home, refugees find themselves again in a situation and place where they are stripped of basic rights and, furthermore, where they lack the means to ameliorate their poor circumstance.

These forms of social isolation and the related degradation of young refugees often serves to justify existing power relationships and hierarchical structures in our society. Clearly, one of the most decisive means for the maintenance of exclusion is the construction of an ‘otherness’ based on ethnicity. Foreign languages and cultures are continuously interpreted as problematic and are regarded as important criteria for distinction. These separate identities serve to distinguish between the ‘own’ and the ‘foreign’. Certainly, attitudes like these have consequences for the opportunities available to young refugees in their country of immigration, in some ways limiting their potential; defined differences between human beings give rise to the victimization of refugees due to discrimination by nationals, resulting in the refusal of benefits and services for some and the privileging of them for others. This form of discrimination, which refers to the personal – especially cultural – background of a group, can definitely be identified as a racist act. In the following I will further qualify the meaning of racism for young refugees in Germany.

1.1 Racism

Socially prominent images of young refugees and migrants are not only a product of media incidents, public scandalization, and political instrumentalization. The construction of the ‘problematic other’ and a homogenized – meaning an undifferentiated, mono-causal, and mono-cultural – perspective are influential for the generalized conceptualization of refugee youth within the framework of contemporary social scientific discourse⁷². The outcome of prevailing representations of a group – whether accurate or not – results in further consolidation of racist attitudes and in the migrant group’s complete segregation. Refugees consider the racism that they are confronted with to be an impediment to social integration. The potential for refugee children to more fully socially

⁶⁹ Geisen & Riegel 2007, 19

⁷⁰ Hoerder / Hébert & Schmitt 2005, 20

⁷¹ 2008, 36

⁷² Geisen et al. 2007, 10/11

integrate is thus severely limited: their access to relevant social resources is hindered, they are at a disadvantage in both the education system and in the job market, and they must meanwhile try to overcome the traumatic experiences of imputation and rejection of their past and present. Refugees suffer rejection from institutions and organizations that are supposed to support them and promote their process of integration. German migrant and racism research – in comparison to many Anglophone countries – does often not consider practices of institutionalized racism. In the Macpherson-Report, institutionalized racism is defined as the:

“collective failure of an organization to offer appropriate and professional supply of services for persons due to their skin color, culture or ethnic background. (...) Derogatory attitudes and behavior contribute to the discrimination and disadvantaging of members of ethnic minorities. This results unknowingly from prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness und racist stereotyping”⁷³

Claus Melter expresses the lack of conscious exclusion, prejudices and ignorance in this definition. He further points out that the collective failure of successful integration results in the construction and degradation of ethnic groups and not simply because of “skin color,” “culture” or “ethnicity”⁷⁴. Melter identifies institutional racism in established discriminatory laws, regulations, and rules of access rather than solely in cases of unprofessional and prejudiced actions carried out by employees. Melter therefore offers a revised definition of institutionalized racism:

“Institutional everyday racism in Germany arises from organizations (through laws, decrees, enactments and access policies as well as through methods of operation, regulations of procedures, and processes) or through their employees, and is systematically performed or merely accepted. It can take the form of exclusionary, discriminatory, or inappropriate – and therefore nonprofessional – behavior towards ethnicized, racialized, culturalized persons or members of religious groups, and towards so-termed ‘non-Germans’ or ‘non-Christians’”⁷⁵

These everyday experiences of racism highlight the rejection of social recognition and belonging for young people, a demographic that struggles to identify further options for continuing integration. Many grow up with the perception that they are not full members of the society they live in. Even those refugees and migrants who are considered to be successfully integrated still fear exclusion and recognize their supposed ‘integration’ as a wholly tentative and transient status – one under constant threat. The reflection on this experience coupled with meager living conditions, which will be discussed in the following section, must be embedded in an international discourse, so that a critical approach can be ensured.

⁷³ Own translation, for original German see: (Macpherson-Report 1999:6.34, Übers. C. M.)

⁷⁴ Geisen et al. 2007, 111

⁷⁵ Own translation, for original German see: (Geisen et al. 2007, 111)

2 Living Conditions

Although many Western nations like Germany attempt to facilitate refugees' stay in their country of arrival, they are ultimately housed in inadequate environments for the trauma they have likely been through: the professional help refugees receive from psychologists and social workers is almost always insufficient, if even available at all. As listed by Jordan, there are five types of accommodation which are common in Germany⁷⁶. They include:

1. The "Bezirkliche Jugendwohnung": a supervised local residential community where young residents are taken care of by an internal and external person in charge. A certain degree of self-reliance is assumed, and this form of accommodation is characterized by its mono-ethnic nature.
2. "Heimerziehung, betreute Wohnform": a second possibility for accommodation that focuses on the group of refugee children and attempts to offer personal development support for youngsters.
3. The "Sozialpädagogische Einzelbetreuung": this form of assisted living serves the function of helping those kids with special needs, concentrating on social integration and self-dependant conduct of life. Further core aspects are to foster the protection of their material existence, to accomplish everyday tasks and crisis situations as well as other personal concerns.
4. The "Jugendpension": accommodation dedicated to preventing homelessness and placing children in hotels or guesthouses. As a consequence of low financial scope and staffing shortage, support and care are limited here; a self-reliant lifestyle of young refugees is thus a precondition.
5. "Gemeinschaftsunterkunft für 16 bis 18-jährige": this final type and special group of housing provides an appropriate frame for coping with the transitional phase from one culture to another and from adolescence to adulthood. One of the principle goals is to avoid the creation of a space of supply.

In spite of the differences between these institutions, each segregates along ethnic lines, such that refugees reside only among their own ethnic group. This common framework for housing separates refugee youth from German peers and prevents their successful integration into a multiethnic society. The lack of integration becomes even more clear in the absence of language training within the space of care facilities: "Sprachförderung innerhalb der Einrichtungen wird nur von ca. 57% der Einrichtungen angegeben und nur ca. 34% der [...] ausgewählten Minderjährigen gewährt"⁷⁷. Language training is supposed to guarantee the development of communication skills in German as well as the maintenance of refugees' mother tongue, in order to help facilitate the bicultural living situations of young refugees. Although the conceptions of housing aim to prepare adolescents for autonomous decision-making and an independent life, they fail to provide

⁷⁶ 2000, 90

⁷⁷ Jordan 2000, 122

necessary support largely due to financial or staffing shortages. It is therefore evident that refugees are not granted access to external communities or the support necessary to become self-reliant. Instead, they are often left alone in an isolated environment and are excluded from mainstream social, political and even private spheres.

3 Access to School and Work

In the first phase of accommodation most children are offered in-house education in which they enroll in programs specially designed for foreign adolescents. The reasoning here is predominantly based on the fact that young refugees typically lack the cultural knowledge and skills to successfully participate in the German economy and society. Programs therefore begin with a German language course and aim to prepare individuals for the General Certificate of Secondary Education. Learning the German language is essential for refugees' academic education, for their professional future, and for their everyday functioning life. On the other hand, they should still have the opportunity to preserve their mother tongue in order to avoid alienation from their home culture and so as to not prevent the opportunity for an eventual return. In order to offer young refugees adequate language training, a standard of systematic measures has to be developed. This concept must embrace the idea of training according to an *individual's* state of knowledge. Whether or not the prevalent arrangement of the procedure meets the real demands of refugee children, however, is not answered by existing literature.

At the same time, other deficits can be readily specified: although the intention of education programs is to carefully introduce young refugees to new learning environments and contacts, the current approach necessarily *excludes* refugee children from the ordinary educational process and denies them contact to potential models of integration, especially German peers. The school – as a place that provides structure and competent teachers as emotionally supportive figures – plays a central role in the lives of most children at risk, but is missing from the lives of young refugees⁷⁸.

Existing literature provides little insight into the career options for refugee minors. According to scattered statements, the integration of adolescents into career advancement tracks is problematic. This can be traced back to the fact that the availability of traineeships and employment is limited. Furthermore, young refugees must face the potential that they will not receive a work permit until their status of exceptional leave to remain is secure⁷⁹. Accordingly, refugees' provisional status usually entails their exclusion from the labor market, even after successfully graduating or demonstrating a high degree of motivation⁸⁰. This rejection of refugees has three major consequences that can be identified: (1) adolescents are firmly bound to remain in an enforced status of idleness; (2) they are completely dependent on governmental financing while going through a phase of learning independent living skills; and (3) they are limited in the ability to shape their own future, particularly with regards to a possible return to countries of origin.

⁷⁸ Welter-Enderlin et al. 2012, 119

⁷⁹ Jordan 2000, 91

⁸⁰ cp. Berliner Flüchtlingsrat 2009, 53 et seqq.

4 Mental Situation

Many refugee minors have witnessed and experienced situations in their home countries that caused tremendous physical and mental strain. These individuals suffered the loss of important attachment figures, friends, and their familiar surroundings. Their lives are frequently affected by anxiety and repression, and many had to deal with violence, torture or imprisonment. While attempting to overcome their traumatic personal histories, they are simultaneously asked to adapt to given regulations and customs:

"Minors who arrive in Germany find themselves confronted with a foreign culture and way of life. The "cultural shock" is immense. All of a sudden, their cultural value system loses its validity; our political and cultural structures are, for them, not (yet) comprehensible"⁸¹

Neuhauser adds that minors face considerable pressure to conform. Their previous ways of acting and feeling, their religious beliefs, and their usual interactions with people are no longer the norm. In addition, these children have to cope with feelings of guilt given that, in many cases, their relatives and friends are often still exposed to the horrors of war, persecution, hunger and pain, while they lead a relatively protected life. The time after entry to a new country becomes even more challenging for young refugees as they become involved in the procedure of gaining the right of asylum:

"In this situation, which is characterized by fear, confusion and helplessness, refugee minors must present a personal account and undergo interrogation as a central aspect of the procedure for granting the right of asylum"⁸²

As a result, many refugee children and adolescents must balance a traumatic past with a troubling present and can be seriously afflicted with mental problems:

"In addition to symptoms of depression, an increased tendency towards aggression indicates a general unstable state which might also be demonstrated by a lack of concentration. Many young refugees suffer from psychosomatic diseases and generally weakened mental and physical resistance"⁸³

Many assessment reports contain descriptions of symptoms of psychosomatic illnesses that are identified in the behavior of young refugees due to their experiences at home, on their 'journey,' and in their new countries of residence. These reports frequently list symptoms like aggressive behavior, depression, risk of suicide, and insomnia. However, in many cases the state fails to provide professional psychological support to treat these conditions. Psychological and therapeutic help is only provided for 6.44% of selected minors⁸⁴. Financing might be one of the reasons for this remarkably low number; a controversial debate might be the other: on the one hand refugee children are frequently either diagnosed as too young to fully and consciously comprehend the brutal incidents of their past; on the other hand, they are often considered to be old enough to cope with their experiences. If no professional help is given to young people in order to confront and actively overcome their experiences of loss and escape, this lack of care will manifest itself in psychosomatic illnesses.

⁸¹ Own translation, for original German see: (Internationaler Bund 1996, cp. Jordan 2000, 27)

⁸² Own translation, for original German see: (Stadtjugendamt/Flüchtlingsamt München 1997, 6)

⁸³ Own translation, for original German see: (Jugendwerk Birkeneck 2006, 25)

⁸⁴ Jordan 2000, 121

4.1 Trauma

Considering the brutal experiences of refugees' past lives, scientists urged administrators to acknowledge refugees as an extremely vulnerable group whose needs should be taken into consideration during the procedure of granting the right of asylum. Instead, those in power introduced repatriation programs and made trauma a determining factor for whether or not refugees should be granted permanent residence. This included stricter control mechanisms in Germany in the 1990s⁸⁵. While political persecution was central to the determination of refugee status in the past, after the introduction of new legislation, a diagnosis of trauma was considered to be the entrance card to Germany for immigrants. Consequently, many refugees pleaded to belong to the group of traumatized refugees. Of course, this phenomenon of omnipresent trauma caused mistrust from official quarters and courts, and many refugees were thus accused of misrepresentation. The outcome was that every person in question had to produce substantiated psychological or medical evidence confirming not only his or her affliction, but also that the statements were 'credible'⁸⁶. Pressure on professionals to furnish an opinion increased, since many refugees started to believe that a 'positive' report would solve their problem of an insecure status in Germany. The debacle indicated that only a few refugees received the help they really needed. For a majority, the requisite psychological help still meant being forced to verbalize issues and memories that frightened and humiliated them, and that recalled traumatizing experiences, all while under pressure. Ultimately, the goal of the appraisal was not help reduce refugees' pain, to repair damaged trust, or to relieve distress. The contrary was the case: seeking a detailed bureaucratic disclosure for authorities, further damaging patient-therapist-relations, and aggravating complaints were accepted outcomes. Many consultants feel that their work is misapplied and that they are falsely appointed for an ethically illegitimate mission of triage⁸⁷.

Considering the significance of trauma for refugees, we should more closely examine the meaning and implications of the term.

Several different definitions of "trauma" exist. These definitions often appear to be inconsistent, but are not necessarily contradictory – trauma simply has a variety of dimensions which can't be captured by a single perspective. In this paper I would like to emphasize trauma as a social and political process. The most relevant definition understands trauma as follows:

"Trauma refers to a social as well as political process. Studies from so-called 'Third-World-Countries' [...] have tried to emphasize that traumatization is not solely an individual process, but also a social process, which impacts the entire society"⁸⁸

On an individual level trauma means a complete mental breakdown, something comparable to the experience of death. The collapse can happen at a single horrific moment or over a long period. In the end, however, the affect is very similar. Somewhere the psyche – that part of us which we frequently identify as the "self" – ceases to function. Trauma is therefore an experience of deep and endless fear – a chronic fear comparable to absolute helplessness – which is no longer located outside of a person, but rather becomes a part of them. The victim is controlled by a threat that is so powerful that

⁸⁵ Bundesweite Arbeitsgemeinschaft 2006, 10

⁸⁶ Bundesweite Arbeitsgemeinschaft 2006, 10

⁸⁷ Bundesweite Arbeitsgemeinschaft 2006, 30

⁸⁸ Own translation, for original German see: (Bundesweite Arbeitsgemeinschaft 2006, 37)

change via individual initiative becomes impossible. The deep ‘wounds’ of trauma always have consequences for us and for our acting; they impact our feelings, behaviour, thinking, and beliefs, and damage our sense of safety such that we start to act in harmful ways for ourselves and for others⁸⁹. It is evident that the influence of traumatic incidences presents an existential risk that can resurface at any given time⁹⁰. Nevertheless, it is important to differentiate between traumatic situations, trauma itself, and symptoms of trauma:

“While the traumatic situation characterizes society, this does not imply that every member of the society has been traumatized. A traumatic situation is requisite for trauma to emerge, however trauma does not always develop from a particular traumatic situation. In the case that trauma results from a traumatic situation, symptoms must be discussed separately, since they can vary enormously among individuals”⁹¹

Although traumatic situations always cause changes in the individual, they do not necessarily induce a corresponding pattern of behavior or necessitate the development of symptoms of trauma. Most importantly, trauma should not be considered to be a static condition; instead, it has a malleable character that changes and develops over time.

When considering refugees, we might assume that the most traumatizing moments were part of their past lives in their countries of origin. This assumption is wrong. The escape *away from* their country of origin is, by contrast, one of the most burdensome experiences that young refugees undergo. It is often assumed that the circumstances that forced refugees to leave their home countries were extremely pressuring, such that Germany seemed to be the right and only way out for them or their family. For many refugees, however, the destination – here, Germany – does not turn out to be the safe haven they were seeking: the perception of ongoing humiliation, persistent discrimination, or neglect in the new country “are assaults upon human dignity [and sometimes cause further] trauma” for refugees⁹². Due to insecure status in Germany and feeling excluded from the German community, the majority of refugee minors do not consider their survival to be something guaranteed long-term. Many experts on trauma suggest that an overall life in fear and insecurity is perhaps even *more* traumatizing than direct experiences of violence for children and adolescents.

Boyes-Watson states that relationships embrace two essential elements for healing wounds of trauma and for developing strong resilience factors: on the one hand there exists the opportunity to talk about what has happened, and on the other hand, there exists the opportunity to reconnect to community and to the core self. Indeed, victims of traumatic incidents need people who silently witness the pain of the victim but at the same time offer support and future perspectives. Refugees need companions who embody both the capacity to empathize and the ability to listen patiently. The responsibility of attachment figures is it to lead the victim to the point where he or she can acknowledge and accept his or her own sorrow and appreciate the depth and the meaning of emotions in order to discover ways of resilience which enable a practical response⁹³. Undoubtedly,

⁸⁹ cp. Hart 2007

⁹⁰ Bundesweite Arbeitsgemeinschaft 2006, 42

⁹¹ Own translation, for original German see: (Bundesweite Arbeitsgemeinschaft 2006, 46)

⁹² Boyes-Watson et al. 2010, 340

⁹³ Boyes-Watson et al. 2010, 123

trauma is a life experience of suffering which can be expressed and perhaps even embraced as a part of individual identity, but one whose wounds are near impossible to completely heal. Extreme forms of traumatic incidents such as rape or murder are terrible experiences that will not disappear from the minds of those affected. Accordingly, the goal is never to 'solve' trauma, but rather to help these scarred individuals to face their losses and fears and perhaps even to bring them to the point where they can share their experiences with their community.

5 The Challenges of Resilience Building for Refugee Children

In addition to normal "adolescent turbulences," refugee minors find themselves in an iterative loop of violence, loss, neglect, economic discrimination, and rejection. What other children can take for granted in their communities, young refugees are excluded from as abandoned and displaced children: the "challenges of living a healthy life are compounded by their status as illegal residents and by the cultural displacement they experience from living between two worlds"⁹⁴. Consequently, these children are not able to develop a sense of belonging, nor are they able to imagine what it means to live a care-free life with certain basic guarantees, like the ability to attend school regularly and to study without constant fear of economic hardship.

Young people who had to escape from a particular country find themselves confronted with serious challenges of integration. Organizations whose primary function it is to support refugees in the process of integration often exacerbate the process due to incredibly long-lasting procedures. The majority of young refugees are extremely troubled as a result of lawsuits and other bureaucratic processes they must undergo – all with the knowledge that residence might only be short-term. Many adolescents hang in limbo for months: can I stay or do I have to go? Only 2% have secure residence permits; the other 98% have unpredictable futures in Germany⁹⁵. Under these conditions, long-term planning is impossible for refugee children; in fact, their life is very much determined by their status. The cruel reality for refugee minors is that the adults in their lives – those who are supposed to keep them grounded – are in most cases unable to provide adequate support due to their own trauma, unemployment, or even absence⁹⁶. The care that young refugees receive inside or outside of existing care facilities cannot compensate for this deficit. For those who are not concerned,

„[i]t is difficult to express [or imagine] all the losses that a refugee child [has to] suffer. Many lose their parents and others, who are close to them. There is the void which is left, when refugee children lose their culture, language, school and friends [...the] things in life which give us hope to continue, reasons for believing in ourselves, and the qualities that allow us to experience joy, tenderness, security, and a belief in the future. That is why it is essential to help refugee children to overcome their ordeal and to prepare for a better future. Children who lose such things are lost to us all"⁹⁷.

The stress young refugees cope with every day is indeed alarming. Risk factors identified in resilience research include the back-and-forth between two cultures, the loss of identity and important attachment figures, and possible rejection in an unknown

⁹⁴ Boyes-Watson 2008, 26

⁹⁵ Jordan 2000, 142

⁹⁶ Boyes-Watson 2008, 23

⁹⁷ Williamson / Crisp & Smyke 1988, 139

environment⁹⁸. When examining the concept of resilience with an explicit focus on the reality of refugees, experts discovered a phase of increased vulnerability that arises from the specifics of the transition (culturally, linguistically, educationally, and socially) from the country of origin to the country of arrival. Bude & Lantermann, who examine the exposure to precarious circumstances, consider feelings of rejection from society – and all its processes and resources – as crucial to the overcoming of exclusion and trauma. Young people who consider themselves to be socially excluded tend to react with resignation and diminished self-care in moments of extreme stress⁹⁹. As such, many refugee children are not able to resolve the problems of their living conditions or social and legal status. Unstable social structures, financial situations, and interpersonal experiences cause paralyzation in the present situations of refugee minors. The establishment of children's autonomy and self-reliance is therefore the key to building factors of resilience.

According to Welter-Enderlin, autonomy strengthens one's capability to defy adverse conditions: "Schlechte Dinge können zu guten werden bedeutet gemäß diesen Studien die Fähigkeit, von Widrigkeiten zu Hoffnung zu gelangen"¹⁰⁰. It is apparent that traumatic experiences do not necessarily harm a person or badly damage his or her life; in fact, the exact opposite can be true. A person's sensitivity, which helps overcome obstacles, can instead have self-healing affects. For many years, experts on mental health focused almost exclusively on the negative effects of biological and psychosocial risk factors. This approach conveyed the impression that children who experienced traumatizing situations like the mental illnesses of their parents or violence were inevitably doomed to failure and delayed development¹⁰¹. During the last two decades this biased perspective has changed: it has become evident that risk factors can be diminished and that resilience can even be nurtured by the generation of stress. In this context, Sobotta, a psychologist at a psychosocial Centre for refugees, notes that the survival strategies and the self-protective potential of young adults and children are remarkable in light of their horrific past experiences. Protective factors, when fully analyzed, will be found internalized in individuals, in their environments, and – in particular – in the processes of transaction between individuals and their surroundings¹⁰².

In order to establish a society in which young refugees do not have to undergo repeated victimization due to their own living conditions, we should attempt to provide a space that ensures the development of protective factors and the successful detection of developmental hazards for children. It is our responsibility to create an environment that does not allow for the rigidity of society and its regulations; instead, we should promote a society that provides preventive measures in order to help reduce the incidence of risk factors among refugee minors.

In the following section, I would like to present the Circle as an approach that promotes resilience within the context of community living and the sharing of experience and knowledge.

⁹⁸ cp. Egle / Hoffmann & Steffens 1997

⁹⁹ Aichinger 2011, 21

¹⁰⁰ Welter-Enderlin et al. 2012, 11

¹⁰¹ Welter-Enderlin et al. 2012, 28

¹⁰² Welter-Enderlin et al. 2012, 126

Chapter IV: Refugees in Circles

In order to understand the significance of supportive approaches in the work with refugees, it is essential to keep in mind that people, behaviours, attitudes and social structures are never 'irreparable'. It is important to remember that no matter what, the core self is always deep within oneself, and nothing has the power to destroy it.

Focussing on resilience, Circles attempt to raise awareness about the fact that personal strengths can derive from challenging situations. But what can Circles offer in order to foster the development of a protective framework for young refugees? In the following I would like to describe the power of Circles in work with refugee minors and to highlight how they can ensure the successful development of resilience:

1 The Ideal of Inclusiveness

In order to find solutions and to understand any sort of issue in all its facets, we need to see through different lenses and to examine problems from different perspectives: the "Circle's wisdom lies in allowing all of this richness to come out and contributes to the fullest understanding of an issue"¹⁰³. Diversity always strengthens a group because variety brings power and knowledge through providing different and new insights to the group. The Circle recognizes the strength of variety and the fact that there are always different ways to pursue a problem. The belief that children are born as competent human beings with unique traits and perspectives is deeply embedded in indigenous Native-American culture. Adults must help promote these gifts and assist the child in recognizing him or herself as special and useful. By doing so, children can both help others and become autonomous in their decision-making¹⁰⁴. Consciously shared power and responsibility through equal dialogue and interaction can, in particular, have healing effects for young refugees and might enable these individuals to finally identify with a group. Verbal exchange and the sharing of thoughts in Circles aims at the development of a sense of solidarity between all participants, in an attempt to pave the way for a healthy and inclusive community¹⁰⁵. Thus, to act in a good and just way "is understood as a gentle process of continually trying to be in 'harmony' with others and the self" which allows a shift away from the common partial procedures of problem solving¹⁰⁶. This shift has to be understood as a constant process and long lasting transformation of people's perception of team spirit. In this process, people must acknowledge that appropriate solutions for a problem will never be found and that behaviours of others will never be improved by rejecting parts of communities and by denying them the right to be accepted members of a group. Such an approach not only neglects other persons, but also breaks the community.

2 Being Heard

Young refugees are often not enabled to show others the different facets of their origin, and consequently crucial parts of their self, such as religious, traditional and cultural values, are missing and impede the mutual understanding between refugee children and caring adults as well as their peers. What people usually see is a socially constructed image of a foreigner who is refused due to generalized deviance. The refusal of

¹⁰³ Boyes-Watson 2008, 106/107

¹⁰⁴ Boyes-Watson et al. 2010, 19

¹⁰⁵ Boyes-Watson, Come Together, 2

¹⁰⁶ Boyes-Watson, Circle of Accountability, 1

acceptance arises from the prevailing biased discourse on integration in Germany which focuses particularly on the refugee's commitment in the process. Too often it is ignored that, aside from legal arrangements, real integration depends to a great extent on acceptance from the majority national group. The integration of adolescents thus not only depends on the will of the individual in question, but also – and especially – on those socioeconomic frameworks and conditions granted by society which allow an appreciation of ethnic differences¹⁰⁷. An environment which guarantees verbal exchange could help to prevent misunderstandings, prejudices and disputes. The opportunity “to tell one's own story in a space where others listen respectfully has enormous potential to salve deep wounds within the community” that has been caused in the course of constant rejection¹⁰⁸. Circles create that space where people get the chance to be heard and seen. People are not only allowed to be part of a collective; they are enabled to speak out loud and to be listened to. This privilege can have healing effects for the speaker, but also for those that listen. One starts to understand the subtle depths of a discussed problem, of the words, and of one's own wounds. The most precious gift the Circle can give to an individual is a voice and the patience of other people to listen to his or her words. The fact that they are listened to in the Circle convinces young people that they are honoured and valued as competent members of a group. The Circle, though, can only serve as a powerful medium due to the fact that people come together “as empathetic witnesses for one another. [...] This is particularly true for young people who have experienced considerable trauma [tic situations] and disconnection in their lives”¹⁰⁹. If all participants grant empathy, Circles usually succeed in establishing a space of recognition and reach a state of all-embracing integration despite cultural differences. With regard to integration in spite of individual differences, Dirk Hoeder et al. address the case of “negotiating trans-cultural Lives”. They describe “transculturation” as a dynamic process in which individuals and societies change over the course of integrating different cultural paths of life and escape from a generalized negative perception of ‘otherness’. Over the course of this process, “[y]oung people, whether long-term residents or recent immigrants, develop life-perspectives by projecting assumed present capabilities, wishes and wide-ranging fantasies into the future, i.e. into their own future and that of their societies. They intend to establish secure yet flexible belongings [...] and start to develop factors of resilience”¹¹⁰.

3 Patience

The Circle's philosophy of equality and respect would be broken if participation was not based on voluntary and autonomous decisions. At times that basis requires patience in order to be fulfilled by all participants. Every commitment takes its time, but if the open invitation to Circles remains, trust in the process of restoring and building positive relationships will be developed by all parties. For young refugees in particular, “who experience the world of rules as established by adults with little flexibility, explanation, or input from them,” it is often difficult to find the right time and words to articulate their thoughts and fears¹¹¹. Having a say within this rigid social construct is foreign to these children. For some adolescents, a Circle likely provides a sphere wherein they are asked what is important for them, what hurts them and what they wish for themselves and for others – all for the very first time. After a while, young people start to trust the procedure and begin to enjoy the appreciation of their personal character by others. In contrast to the

¹⁰⁷ cp. Verba / Lehman Schlozman & Brady 1995, 10

¹⁰⁸ Boyes-Watson 2008, 64

¹⁰⁹ Boyes-Watson 2008, 64

¹¹⁰ Hoerder et al. 2005, 21

¹¹¹ Boyes-Watson 2002, 15

usual experience of being judged for mistakes, of being condemned for the harm people have caused, every individual is finally enabled to take on responsibility for their actions and to make demands in Circles thanks to feelings of safety, respect, and appreciation. Only the own wish to change, help, and find solutions assures that the outcome will be persistent.

4 Empathy

The Circle is first of all interested in a subjective truth, emotional and intellectual memories of biographical events. In many cases traumatic experiences are part of that truth and have left deep scars which impede or even preclude verbalizing thoughts and emotions¹¹². A central factor for the improvement of a refugee's state of mind or the healing of deep wounds is finding a trustworthy counterpart who can become a witness to his or her suffering. Such a relationship can help the victim accept traumatizing experiences, to find trust in the self, in the world and its people, and to integrate all the pains and damages into a personal understanding of the self as a complete human being. In order to help, people simply have to develop a strong sense of empathy. Empathy allows individuals to emotionally engage with extremely stressful stories from the past or present. In addition, witnessing traumatic personal experiences and contacting people who have been harmed changes one's own worldview. Everyone in the Circle who listens to stories of deep suffering might begin to challenge everything that has been familiar to them – all that they knew or believed in. However, the wish to talk must always be voluntarily:

“Persons who are directly or indirectly affected by trauma are often conflicted between the wish to talk and the wish to remain silent. These individuals not only have the right to keep silent, but silence can also be essential for survival and crisis prevention”¹¹³

Over the course of sharing a subjective truth of the world it is important in a second step that a person starts to acknowledge his or her pain that has been caused through harm, loss, neglect, or damage. At this point, the “challenge is [rather] to create a space where we can have these hard conversations in a most gentle and good way”¹¹⁴. The sense of emotional safety and mutual recognition in the Circle usually enables people to talk about traumatic experiences. Only by acknowledging their vulnerability traumatized individuals can begin to heal the wounds – if one does not accept or see one's wounds, there is no way to heal them. What one does not see, one cannot change. What one thinks is not there cannot be changed. The first step is to recognize that something is wrong, and then – and only then – to improve or restore it.

5 The Ideal of Interconnectedness

The egalitarian philosophy of the Circle reflects its tribute to the cycles of life: “infancy, adolescence, adulthood, and old age [... are all equalized in an inter- and intragenerational dialogue] and the four dimensions of human beings – physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual” – are all considered in the emotional process of healing¹¹⁵. Every element of the Circle is understood to be an essential part of a balanced larger whole. Accordingly, this balance is disturbed if one link in the chain causes harm to itself or to another nearby link. If there is a problem or conflict, its cause must be isolated and

¹¹² Bundesweite Arbeitsgemeinschaft 2006, 17

¹¹³ Own translation, for original German see: (Bundesweite Arbeitsgemeinschaft 2006, 23)

¹¹⁴ Boyes-Watson, Come Together, 3

¹¹⁵ Boyes-Watson 2008, 82

resolved. We must therefore carefully consider community dynamics and multiple different perspectives to any particular issue; this allows for a holistic approach to conflict resolution. An anonymous African expression asserts that “I am because we are,” highlighting how personal strength and well-being are functions of a strong and positive community-wide spirit¹¹⁶. The group gains power through its individuals, and vice versa: each person is strong because of the group¹¹⁷. This ancient wisdom holds that everything in the world is interrelated as part of one unified whole. Nothing can exist or ‘be’ in isolation, but must define itself in relation to its surroundings; it is thus our duty to achieve a balance between all individual parts. Circles adopt a radically new approach for analyzing the social world, one in which we understand the development of an individual as a direct function of his or her community. As such, every Circle acknowledges that relationships are crucial parts of who we are – and they accordingly influence us as human beings.

6 Relationships

Young refugees constantly experience “[m]uch harm [...] through relationships of domination and control” in their home countries as well as in Germany. They experience firsthand the ways in which communities are divided into categories and statuses that separate people from each other in all areas of life. Indeed, these relations of power implement a complex and varying figuration of “native and outcast”¹¹⁸. Evidently, this form of categorization and cultural dominance challenges the ways in which individuals interact with one another: with underlying hierarchical statuses, it is difficult for there to exist equal, reciprocal relationships. Thus, children and teenagers who come to Germany need to be offered “a genuine connection with adults who believe in them” and the competencies they have to offer¹¹⁹. It is therefore important to help develop strong and positive relationships between adults and youth – ideally, these relationships should function supportively, absolutely, and unconditionally. Reliable and strong relations with a steady attachment figure – one who induces resilient features in the child and who shields the child from risks – is one of the most concise protective factors for refugee children¹²⁰. On the basis of verbal exchange and mutual understanding, Circles are spaces for profound relationships like those that fit this description; indeed, Circles teach us how to build and obtain healthy interactions.

The acceptance of every single person present is a fundamental part of the Circle, though every peacemaking process strives for more than just acceptance: achieving respect for one another is the ultimate goal. Honneth states that, for young refugees, it is less about the struggle for acceptance than about an aspiration for respect – something that is lacking in most of their lives and relationships¹²¹. The refugee child’s challenge is defined by the considerable differentiation between self-esteem and recognition from others. While recognition from others arises from efforts and achievements, self-esteem is consolidated in the personality of a person. Thus, striving for respect involves unquestionable acceptance by others – not based on achievements, but rather on the common experience of living in and sharing one world. Another difference is the fact that the process of recognition includes the social

¹¹⁶ Boyes-Watson et al. 2010, 16

¹¹⁷ Boyes-Watson 2008, 104

¹¹⁸ Boyes-Watson et al. 2010, 10

¹¹⁹ Boyes-Watson 2008, 15

¹²⁰ Aichinger 2011, 29

¹²¹ cp. Sennett 2004

measure of value. Accordingly, recognition can be closely related to social superiority, since the attribution of individuals defines the right for the determination of difference. The opposite happens in the aspiration for respect: it refers to the 'other' by recognizing and maintaining the shared desire for self-esteem. Consequently, it is not differences, but *similarities* between people that are the source for respect¹²². Richard Sennett describes the consequences of relationships that lack respect as follows:

"A lack of respect may seem to be less aggressive than a direct insult but can nevertheless be equally offensive. The person in concern is not insulted but is also not recognized; he or she is not regarded as a human being whose presence is valued"¹²³

Self-esteem and respect are crucial to the development of adolescents. In most studies on the matter, a certain relationship pattern has demonstrated the worth of values like appreciation, respect, and acceptance towards children. The experience of respect and support inside of Circles helps to build self-esteem and confidence; it rebuilds trust and hope for the future and for foreseeable interactions¹²⁴. Nevertheless, more than the genuine respect from others is needed for the successful realization of dreams and wishes.

A further crucial factor for the development of young refugees is a balance between autonomy and influential relationships. Problematic courses of adolescence often result from heteronomy – essentially, a self-fulfilling prophecy in which labeling according to conventional stereotypes and to the distribution of biographical chances and risks negatively impacts youth¹²⁵. King comments on this specific form of struggle endured by young refugees and migrants as follows:

"Indeed, there are characteristic correlations [between the construction of social stereotypes and exterior heteronomy]. Migrant youth and unemployed youth alike struggle more than average to achieve social recognition or to cope with disadvantageous basic social conditions when attempting to establish themselves in the culture of their immigration society"¹²⁶

Respect in the realm of autonomy means to respect a person's decisions. If refugees are supposed to conduct their lives independently, outside of the Circle, it is necessary to grant them room for individual agency, action, and participation. The main responsibility of attachment figures is to foster adaptive competences that allow networking with relevant living environments. They should also refer to the development of skills that ensure independence and autonomy. Circles recognize this need and therefore provide an environment which ensures voluntary involvement of all participants. In particular, work with refugee children who have experienced traumatic situations requires an incredible degree of sensitivity regarding self-determination:

¹²² Geisen et al. 2007, 44

¹²³ Own translation, for original German see: (Sennett 2004, 15)

¹²⁴ Lewis 2002, 15

¹²⁵ King & Müller 2000, 19

¹²⁶ Own translation, for original German see: (King 2004, 96)

“From practical therapeutic work we know that, especially in cases of extreme border violation like torture or rape, it is essential to recognize that limits must be determined by the victims in question”¹²⁷

It must always be a free decision of those in question to remember and to talk. The key to avoiding repeated moments of traumatization is to create a space where free decision-making is possible. In spaces other than the Circle, people are often forced to recall traumatic incidents – which in turn overwhelm them and force them to relive experiences of violence and helplessness. Advocates of Circle work recognize that it is inhumane to expect people to discuss their most personal, intimate, and harmful experiences in the framework of a situation characterized by pressure and force; they therefore emphasize the importance of the ‘open invitation’ to share during the process.

Overall, the quality of our relationships in society reflects the quality of our own mental states and our abilities to cope with challenging conditions. Accordingly, it is exactly these relationships that are needed to promote change and to achieve sustainability in a refugee’s life. Protective factors provided through the environment coupled with individual competences are essential for persistent change. Resilience must therefore be considered a relational construct that asks for reliable interaction between different social parties in order to detect positive resources in and around refugee children. Indeed, there are a great variety of ways to provide protective factors for refugees who suffer from repressive systems; the peacemaking circle is one such option. The power of the Circle is gained through its participants and through the desire to protect everyone involved from further harm. All of an individual’s precious experiences and everything an individual acquires inside of the Circle can be taken and applied in the outside world: wounds that are healed, relationships that have been forged, and thoughts, ideas, and experiences that have been shared create a strong belief that we have the capacity to take care of ourselves and of one another. This – along with a profound trust in the self and in other people – grants the strength to develop positively and to overcome hardship in this world.

¹²⁷ Own translation, for original German see: (Bundesweite Arbeitsgemeinschaft 2006, 23)

Chapter V: Conclusion

Many communities are characterized by a deficit-oriented and blame-inducing attitude towards children with migration backgrounds and demonstrate little patience for problematic cases. They treat people as the cause of certain social problems instead of seeing them as the “bearer of its most disturbing symptoms”¹²⁸. Rather than embracing refugee youth with the ultimate goal of helping and changing them, people tend to exclude these so-called ‘problem children’ from society. Instead, they try to get rid of them and fail to notice that their actions always have consequences and impact other people. In particular, when encountering persons who experienced severe trauma, individuals often feel inhibited from reaching out. Because many people fear to do more harm than good to potentially traumatized people, they decide to do nothing at all. Feelings of incompetence entail the retreat of some, and at the same time mean isolation for others. A fundamental trust in one’s own competencies and the self-healing power of the person concerned is frequently missing. As a result, many people do not perceive the far side of young refugees and are unable to recognize the personal responsibility and strength they still bear in their daily struggle for life – in spite of the fact that many of these individuals face adverse conditions and constant rejection. Thus, it often remains invisible for people to see what these children, despite all crises, can accomplish. They defy their modest living conditions, their past and their present, and are able to develop protective factors due to their individual capacities. The concept of resilience deserves credit for casting light on a side of human capacity which had always existed, but had been neglected in social discourse: namely, that human beings and their environments not only manifest damages, but also hold strengths; both strengths and weaknesses have to be seen as interconnected phenomena.

Nevertheless, children develop resilience most strongly when basic emotional needs are met. A child that experiences a lasting feeling of security, love, care, devotion and appreciation develops a sense of self-esteem. The development of resilience cannot be solely reduced to the responsibility of the children and their parents, but has to include other different social systems and an overall belief in the idea that all human beings are able to strive for the love and care they need:

“There is much suffering in the world – physical, material, mental. But the greatest suffering is being lonely, feeling unloved, having no one. I have come more and more to realize that it is being unwanted that is the worst disease that any human being can ever experience”¹²⁹.

Above all, resilience means empowerment of the child and the creation of new supportive systems. An approach which embeds resilience as a matter of inclusiveness and interconnectedness, and which works in a sensitive and solid way with the focus on different social levels, would be laudable.

I see the Circle as an opportunity to reach that goal, but still it is obvious that Circles cannot be considered to be the only possible approach. There are certainly many good ways to handle adverse conditions and issues of inclusion in Germany. In order to grasp the Circle in its absoluteness, I will therefore discuss some challenges and enrichments that the work of Circles involve.

¹²⁸ Boyes-Watson 2008, 4

¹²⁹ Boyes-Watson et al. 2010, Mother Teresa, 18

1 Challenges

One major challenge for the successful implementation of Circles in Germany is the rigid adherence to known structures and methods within the judicial and social systems. The perceived definition of justice in our society still includes the punishment of the perpetrator¹³⁰. The prevailing assumption in modern Western societies – that systems on the top level will provide victims and delinquents with what they deserve – paralyzes people in their personal scope. In this light, many people consider the peacemaking circle to be a rather inspirational story than an institutionalized practice ready for implementation in communities. Especially at this point, innovation is hard because it asks for an overall paradigm shift from all people and to reconsider our known structures. In this case, the approach itself is not the problem, but rather society's defensive demeanour regarding new forms of restoring justice and providing mechanisms of inclusion – this, above all, makes the implementation of peacemaking circles challenging.

Additionally, to think that peacemaking circles always work would be an illusion. One of the core elements that helps ensure the effectiveness of Circles is the voluntary and devoted participation of its members. Of course people are sceptical and distrustful when they try something new, but most still try. If people refuse to be part of a Circle, the approach to solve a problem will fail. Thus, every Circle highly depends on the absolute commitment of its participants, which is not always easy. Often, the search for “social justice by peaceful means is [...] undermined by the tremendous rage and hurt carried in the hearts of those who have been oppressed” and consequently does not enable everyone to develop understanding or trust for other people¹³¹. So, it is true: for some individuals, ‘relieving words’ and ‘peaceful interaction’ might not be the correct path to restoring personal justice.

Another central challenge to the peacemaking process is to make the Circle accessible for everyone. Language barriers in particular become more visible when working with children and non-native German speakers. A further concern demands a consideration of extreme sensitivity to cultural differences when creating “appropriate symbols and rituals”¹³². It is important that every participant feels welcomed and comfortable in the Circle setting. Accordingly, Circles need to be creative in order to grant everyone the chance to speak and to listen, to become part of a community, to express angers, fears, and worries. Circles should be designed so that they are neither boring nor alienating, and – above all – they should not be a privilege for only some participants.

Furthermore, it is of great importance that Circles are not exclusively considered to be adaptive only for negative concerns. Of course, they have the function to solve problems and conflicts and to share emotional grief, but a Circle has more to offer than confrontation with burdening conversations and interactions. Above all else, a Circle is a tool that brings people together in a positive way and that leads people to their better core self, the self that has been hidden inside. We must not forget that Circles are above all about good things.

¹³⁰ cp. Appendix 2, 3rd question

¹³¹ Boyes-Watson 2001, 21

¹³² Boyes-Watson 2002, 10

2 Enrichments

We should not view Circles as an “instead” to our already existing juridical system, but as an additional traditional instrument that could be embedded into contemporary procedures of restorative justice. The question is: what is it that Circles can offer that other conflict resolution approaches do not incorporate? Peacemaking circles can certainly help in moving our society from a place of isolation and distrust to a place of mutual respect and cooperation. One of the central ideas behind Circles is a collective goal of striving for a strong and inclusive community.

Everything that the Circle offers might seem to be quite simple; in reality, the only simple things about Circles are that they are free, they are easy to teach and understand, they can be adapted anywhere, and that no special equipment is required for operation. Indeed, the Circle as a way of coming together is a powerful tool. The Circle is a place of true and genuine equality, a place where we are not simply told to be the same, but where equality is lived. It is an approach that provides a space of safety and trust where self-serving individuals are transformed into accountable members of their community. A Native American saying tells us that, “you can’t get to a good place in a bad way”¹³³. It is a simple message, but usually one that is hard to achieve. To be in a good place means re-establishing relationships and rethinking established values and rules. The practice of peacemaking circles brings people together not only in good times, but also – and perhaps especially – in hard times. The divisions between people bring them together in Circles.

For a long time, tensions between two cultures seemed to present an insurmountable obstacle. Past decades have proven that nation-cultural orientation as a dominant rule for cultural and social judgment in society never left room for others, especially not for a multicultural orientation. Instead, differentiation and related organizing of cultures in hierarchies always resulted in a limited scope for individuals. Circles try to address this perception. Above all, they attempt to highlight what people have in common. The Circle therefore represents a multicultural and multiethnic setting, but also includes the challenges of regular diversity, such as age, gender, social status, and other personal backgrounds. The work of Circles focuses on bringing people who are apart together and showing them that – despite differences – they are equal in many ways.

Circles do not exclusively address negative topics; they also focus on solutions, consensus, and what people have in common. Peacemaking circles offer spaces where one can find safety and peace through talking, listening, and mutual understanding. The Circle is a place where people enjoy the right to speak, the duty to listen, and the freedom to remain silent. Deep mutual understanding is supposed to “move[...] people from debate to shared vision”¹³⁴. In an adult-dominated world, especially young people “are marginalized and voiceless” – Circles instead intend to offer a stage for equal participation¹³⁵. Circles are therefore considered to be places of honest healing where one can teach emotional literacy, practice empathy, and try to understand other people’s motives of acting.

Circle processes help discover and recognize the harm that people do to themselves and the impact our behaviour has on others. A Circle provides a stage where people can

¹³³ Boyes-Watson 2001, 18

¹³⁴ Lewis 2002, 9

¹³⁵ Boyes-Watson 2002, 13

articulate their fears, where everyone can express wishes for and thoughts about themselves or the community. It is a place where individuals can be honest with themselves and others and where everyone receives recognition and appreciation. A young woman who experienced the work of Circles finds the right words to describe the peacemaking approach, saying: “everybody sits in a Circle, and regardless of where they’re from, whatever culture or background – regardless of that – the reason we are all there is because we understand that we just want love, we just want peace. And I just think that it is so beautiful”¹³⁶.

Circles are based on the belief that every human being embeds positive and powerful features deep within the self – features that have always been there and that will be there forever. The positive energy of every member in the course of the peacemaking procedure is highly appreciated. Accordingly, Boyes-Watson emphasizes that “[t]he awesome power of the circle is not in the magic of the ritual or technique but in the enormous capacity of people to heal and solve problems when they come together in a good way”¹³⁷. Young people in particular begin to recognize that they are powerful members of society, and that they equal others in both ability and capacity to provide a group with solutions. Everything that happens in the Circle is therefore the result of group dynamics; there is not a single person that controls the events in form of a leader, but it is rather the group and the empowerment of its members that gives the Circle a life of its own.

According to Hanna Arendt, the fundamental right of every person is the right to have rights¹³⁸. Meeting refugees means meeting human beings who lack exactly this fundamental right. It is our responsibility to embed practices that promote human rights in our social system by introducing appropriate structures and rules. It might seem unrealistic to realize this goal, but Circle work considers building a society to be a core value, in which everyone finds a place due to mutual acceptance and tolerance – which ultimately develops towards a state of more humane culture. We should always question if we treat other people respectfully, if we guard their human rights and focus on the problems of our society, including those we ourselves are subject to. These responsibilities that we commit ourselves to inside the Circle must be applied to broader life; in the end, the treatment of people outside of the Circle is a decisive measure for the degree of humanity in our society.

Many people likely still do not believe in the shifting and healing power of Circles, but perhaps they dare to believe in an opportunity to address problems that restrain successful social interaction. We should always remember: if we bring forth the best of ourselves, we might manage to bring forth the best that is hidden in others.

Ultimately, we learn from the peacemaking process that everything gained inside Circles could be applied beyond the lines of Circle work. After all, we recognize that “[to] sit in Circle, we don’t need to be sitting in a circle”¹³⁹.

¹³⁶ A Seventeen-Year-Old Young Woman, Boyes-Watson 2008, 79/80

¹³⁷ 2002, 9

¹³⁸ Bundesweite Arbeitsgemeinschaft 2006, 12

¹³⁹ Peacemaking Circles and Urban Youth, 84

Appendix

- 1 Introduction of Experts
- 2 Questionnaire Victor Jose Santana
- 3 Interview Katrin Groninger

1 Introduction of Experts



Elmar G. M. Weitekamp, Prof. Ph.D., studied social work in Mönchengladbach (Germany) and at the University of Pennsylvania (U.S.A.). He is currently a Senior Research Associate at the Institute of Criminology, a professor of victimology and restorative justice at the University of Tübingen (Germany) and a Board Member of the World Society of Victimology. For many years Elmar Weitekamp works in the field of restorative justice and tries to implement the peacemaking Circles in Germany.

https://ghum.kuleuven.be/ggs/publications/working_papers/new_series/wp31-40/wp31.pdf



Katrin Groninger is a psychologist and works in the field of psychotherapy, training, research and evaluation. From 2000-2004, Kathrin Groninger was associated with the Center for Refugee and Migration Service of the German Red Cross and offered psychosocial counseling for refugees coming from war and crises regions. Since 2009 Kathrin Groninger has been a member of OPSI (Office for Psychosocial Issues) through which she evaluated projects in a German wide violence prevention program.

<http://opsiconsult.com/team/kathrin-groninger/>



David Becker, Ph.D., is a trained psychologist. After having worked for many years with victims of political persecution in Chile he is now based at the International Academy for Innovative Education, Psychology and Economy (INA) at the Free University of Berlin. In 2002 he was a co-founder of the Office for Psychosocial Issues (OPSI) at the International Academy (INA), through which he works as a consultant for international organizations in reference to psychosocial projects in regions of conflict and war. He has published extensively on the issues of trauma, human rights, and dealing with the past.

<http://opsiconsult.com/team/dr-david-becker/>



Victor Jose Santana holds a Masters in Arts specializing in youth leadership development through trauma awareness and Circles. Currently, he mentors students from the Master of Public Health Program at California State University Northridge on how to conduct disease surveillance and community outreach in multicultural communities. As founder and CEO of VJS Consulting, Victor Jose offers an alternative to contemporary meeting processes and leadership development. He furthermore works as a facilitator and educator in peacemaking circles, community health work, and trauma awareness.

<http://www.linkedin.com/pub/victor-jose-santana/46/bb9/bb4>



Carolyn Boyes-Watson, Ph.D., is the Director of Suffolk University's Center for Restorative Justice and an Associate Professor of Sociology at Suffolk University. She has published in the area of restorative justice, criminal justice, technology and social control and drug policy. She is currently Vice President of the Board of Directors of the Massachusetts Correctional Legal Services, the prisoners' rights organization of Massachusetts. Her current research interests include restorative justice and criminal justice policy and she teaches in the areas of criminal justice, juvenile justice and restorative justice.

<http://www.ikedacenter.org/thinkers-themes/thinkers/interviews/carolyn-boyes-watson>

2 Questionnaire Victor Jose Santana

1. Which aspects of Peacemaking Circles are most often critiqued?

When I first started to practice Circle some social work clinicians wondered how Circles are different than group psychotherapy.

2. For example, can you imagine any critique from the perspective of reformatory justice or feminism?

They would probably say not every situation is appropriate for circle. Some reformatory justice folks might say that Circles don't punish offenders.

3. In your opinion, are there any particular reasons why Peacemaking Circles are not more prominent or widely practiced throughout Europe and the rest of the world?

Because to widely accept and use Circles would mean that governments, communities and agencies would have to change the way they operate. Most western systems are based on punitive accountability and using Circles would mean that they would have to change the way they operate and most places don't want that. The other thing is that in all of the places where there has been colonization the most significant strategy has been to destroy the culture and traditions of indigenous people in order to have them fall apart. However thanks to some elders they were able to weave their knowledge through oratory traditions in order to teach their children and their children's children. Now that the world is shifting the Circle has been adapted and reintroduced to communities all over the world.

4. In your experience have there been cases of Peacemaking Circles where the victims were children?

Yes. I worked with a family from Central America whose child had been traumatized.

5. Why / Why not is the Peacemaking Circle a good approach to working with children that have been traumatized?

You have to be very careful in this area because talking about trauma is good however; in order to lead an effective trauma informed Circle it is best to understand trauma yourself and have an experienced Circle keeper lead it. This is also an area where clinicians or doctors can challenge the circle process but the Circle process is not therapy.

6. How can one go about making Peacemaking Circles without putting the victims in a place where they are once again subjugated and/or wounded?

You interview them first to see if a Circle would be appropriate. A lot of planning should go into it and the victim should be able to bring their supports (family, friends, and community). If you follow the circle guidelines the victim should feel safe and empowered to share.

7. Do you have any recommendations for books on the history of the use of Peacemaking Circles (where do the Pmc's have their roots and how were they discovered)?

Every culture sat in circle at point or another. The peacemaking circle process that I was taught were adapted by Mark Wedge (First Nations Leader Tagish Tlingit, Yukon), Judge Barry Stuart (Judge in Canada), and Kay Pranis (International Restorative Justice Practitioner). They took an ancient tradition and adapted it and brought into contemporary times.

There is a book called "Boiling Energy" written by Dr. Richard Katz where he explored the community healing Circles of the Klahari Kung people. They had been running healing circles for thousands of years.

8. Has there ever been a challenging case for you, where it was difficult to stick to the values of circle and remain trustful, respectful?

In regards to a challenging cases in Circle there have been many. There was one time were people were beginning to be very disrespectful in Circle and I have had to stop the Circle because the participants were not following the values/guidelines. In that case I stopped the Circle and we tried to do it again the next day. Although things might be challenging I have never broken trust or respect. Inside my my mind and heart I might be having a hard time with a topic but it is my responsibility as a Circle keeper to model the values. If I can't do that, even under the most stressful situations then I should not be keeping Circle.

3 Transcription

Interview on the Situation of Refugees in Germany

Subject:	The situations of refugees in Germany
Name of the interviewee:	Katrin Groninger
Code-name of the interviewee:	G
Name of the interviewer:	Mounira Ammar
Code-name of the interviewer:	I
Date of the interview:	14.03.2013
Duration of the interview:	72:09 minutes
Applied rules of transcription:	Drew 1995: 78; zitiert in Flick 2007: 380
Version:	Revised

I: Könntest du zunächst vielleicht deine bisherige Arbeit beschreiben?

G: Ich bin Psychologin. Ich war in den letzten 4 Jahren insbesondere in Ruanda mit dem Zivilen Friedensdienst ... und habe da ein Projekt entwickelt mit Frauen die Kinder bekommen haben in Folge von Vergewaltigungen. Es war also eine Arbeit wo es um Kinder ging, jedoch vor allem in Bezug auf die Elternarbeit, die Arbeit mit den Müttern also...

I: Also hast du dort weniger Erfahrungen mit Arbeiten gemacht die Kinder aktiv einbeziehen?

G: Naja ... also mit den Kindern haben wir direkt immer mal wieder was gemacht so ... aber das war weniger eine therapeutische oder beraterische Arbeit mit denen, sondern eigentlich noch ... sie waren ja so 14 15 das war nicht /ehm/ zu dem Zeitpunkt wo: ... da wussten sie ja gar nicht wie sie was für Kindern sie sind ((lächelnd)) also da konnte man dann auch nicht offen mit ihnen darüber reden, ja? Aber, also ... und ich habe in der Flüchtlingsarbeit die ich hier gemacht habe auch immer mit den Familien gearbeitet aber auch ... also nicht mit den Kindern direkt. Ja? Also ich habe da keine Gruppen angeleitet mit Kindern (3 Sek) Keine Kinderberatung also

I: Aber über die Familien bzw. den Kindern als Mitglied der Familie hast du dann mit ihnen gearbeitet?

G: Genau.

I: Wo war das? Also wo hast du diese Flüchtlingsarbeit gemacht?

G: Vielleicht kennst du das Beratungszentrum für Folteropfer in Berlin?

I: Ja.

G: ... Und die haben einen Bereich der heißt Z /ehm/...ZFM...Zentrum für Flüchtlingshilfen und Migrationsdienste ... und in diesem Zentrum habe ich gearbeitet. Das war aber früher unter dem Dach des Deutschen Roten Kreuzes ... Ja?

I: Ok. Und wie sahen da deine Aufgaben aus?

G: Ich habe da Sozialberatung gemacht, also so als auch psych- so therapeutische Arbeit. Das heißt ... sowohl (2 Sek) /ehm/ ... ich habe quasi alle die Familien betreut die neben den ... sag ich mal sons- sonstigen sozialarbeiterischen Themen auch psychische Beeinträchti- Beeinträchtigungen hatten ... weil jetzt ein Elternteil traumatisiert war oder ein Kinder oder ... also wo es auch /ehm/ (2 Sek) also im Status, dem rechtlichen Status als traumatisierter Flüchtling gilt, ja? Wo die ja nur das Aufenthaltsrecht verlängert bekommen haben, weil sie dieses Gutachten hatten, dass sie traumatisiert sind. Und diese Gruppen habe ich /ehm/ dann betreut

I: Ok (4 Sek)

G: Und da ging es dann sowohl um die Beratung also mit dem Antrag, also Anträge schreiben an das Sozialamt aber auch psychologische Gutachten zu schreiben ... Also,

und die Gruppen die da waren, da habe ich hauptsächlich mit den Frauen in der Gruppe gearbeitet ... ne

I: Also du hast dich schon immer auf die Gruppe der Frauen konzentriert oder war das eher zufälligerweise?

G: Ja: in der Gruppe also (2 Sek) in der Arbeit mit den Gruppen ja, aber in der Beratung waren auch Männer und in den ... sag ich mal ... in den einzelnen therapeutischen Gesprächen waren auch Männer (3 Sek) deshalb zu den aktuellen ... das ist jetzt (2 Sek) auch ... schon wieder (3 Sek) ja acht Jahre her ... Und /ehm/ damals wurde ziemlich wenig noch gemacht für Kinder und Jugendliche ... also für die gab es natürlich spezielle /ehm/ Institutionen (2 Sek) aber (2 Sek) da war der Bedarf schon ziemlich groß für die- für die Eltern erstmal durch die Bewegung in Ex-Jugoslawien, durch den Krieg...

I: Kannst du denn irgendwas zu dem aktuellen Stand sagen der Flüchtlinge, also beispielsweise was für Gruppen kommen denn vermehrt nach Deutschland und warum?

G: Nee ...da kann ich- da bin ich nicht auf dem aktuellen Stand

I: OK (2 Sek) dann überspringe ich einfach ein paar Fragen. Oder vielleicht kannst du ja noch aus deiner Erfahrung und Erinnerungen ... ich weiß nicht wie viel sich da jetzt in acht Jahren geändert hat /ehm/ aber vielleicht einfach mal erzählen wie denn generell die Situation von Flüchtlingen in Deutschland war die du betreut hast ... Also von der Unterbringung her, Schulbesuchen bei Kindern und der Zugang zu Arbeit oder Ausbildung. Wie war das vor acht Jahren?

G: (5 Sek) Schon sehr prekär (3 Sek)

I: In wie fern?

G: ... Also in der ... also es gab da auch eine Entwicklung muss ich sagen ... also in der ersten sag ich mal ((lächelnd)) in der ersten Phase der ...der Flüchtlingsarbeit in den 90ern und dann Anfang 2000 /ehm/ da ging es ... ganz stark darum um um Abschiebung um ... um das die überhaupt irgendeine Form der Sozialhilfe ... Sozialleistung das die irgendeine Form der Sozialhilfeleistung bekommen ... und da gab es ganz viele die- weil sie eine Abschiebungsandrohung bekommen haben gar keine Sozialleistung mehr bekommen oder beantragen konnten wenn die Duldung quasi am ablaufen war ... also da war quasi ... und und wir als Psychologen waren dann immer so der Rettungsanker das wir so ((lächelnd)) Trauma-Atteste geschrieben haben (2 Sek) Auch so ... also auch kurze /ehm/ Stellungnahmen, psychologische Stellungnahmen die besagen, diese Person ist traumatisiert ... die hat Gewalt erlebt hier wurden Familienmitglieder umgebracht während dem Krieg die die hat- die braucht die Sozialleistung (3 Sek) also so eine auch ziemlich prekäre Situation das die Leute uns brauchen um dann an das eig- beziehungsweise um an die Grundlagen zum Leben überhaupt zu kommen ... Also deshalb war es auch eine sehr schwierige Arbeit weil es so ... man ist immer so- wie eine Feuerwehr die so gerufen wurde ... es gab ständig nur Notfälle ... es war also (4 Sek) unglaublich... und da war einfach die die- die das Zentrum für Flüchtlingshilfen und Migrationsdienste eine Institution die niedrigschwellig die Leute betreut hat. Das heißt die große therapeutische Gruppen gemacht hat mit bis zu 40 Leuten um den damit einen Therapieplatz abzustempeln ... zu zu zu um den ... also es ging natürlich schon um qualitativ gute Arbeit in den Gruppen, aber einfach in der Menge um es jedem attestieren zu können ja?

Damit die quasi nicht abgeschoben werden so das sie einen Abschiebeschutz kriegen (2 Sek) und (4 Sek) und ... aber ... entsprechend schwierig war dann die eigentliche therapeutische Arbeit und das war dann sozusagen die erste Phase Ende der 90er Anfang 2000 und dadurch sind dann über Rückkehrprogramme auch einige zurückgegangen oder auch viele wurden abgeschoben oder sind zwa:ngsweise wieder zurück weil sie sehr ... ja also gemerkt haben, dass ist hier einfach zu schwierig (3 Sek) und Die die dann über die kleine Rechtsregelung hier bleiben konnten die konnten auch nur hier bleiben zum Teil wenn sie Arbeit hatten und da fingen da die Programme an die Leute wirklich in die Arbeit zu bringen Ausbildungen Sprachkurse also Sprachkurse die dann gleich auch schon so ein Modul /ehm/ hatten in Richtung Pflege oder in Richtung Hausmeistertätigkeiten so für ungelernte oder nicht gut ausgebildete Flüchtlinge sodass sie an Arbeit kommen also es wurde dann schon ein bisschen ausdifferenziert von der von der Hilfe

I: Ich stell mir das nur wahnsinnig schwer vor unter den von dir genannten Umständen Arbeit zu bekommen

G: Ja sehr

I: Auch was die Unterstützung betrifft

G: Da gab es dann Zusammenarbeiten mit bestimmten auch Institutionen also firmen /ehm/ wo die Leute dann Praktikum machen konnten wo die Beratungsstellen quasi Kontakte geknüpft hat mit den Firmen ... das ZFM was im Behandlungszentrum ist die machen auch weiterhin diese Beratung

I: Also ... das heißt es wird sich schon bemüht Flüchtlingen ein wenig die Pforten zu öffnen? Also vor allem eben in den Bereichen Ausbildung und Arbeit

G: Ja ja es gibt viele Leute die über den genannten Weg eben Arbeit gefunden haben und gerade im Pflegebereich /ehm/ ganz gut untergekommen sind (3 Sek)

I: Dadurch dass du ja auch Erfahrung also vor allem im therapeutischen Bereich hast kannst du bestimmt einschätzen ... also diese Menschen kamen ja oder sehr viele von ihnen kamen aufgrund von Krieg oder Armut im Land und waren dementsprechend womöglich traumatischen Situationen ausgesetzt und dann nach Deutschland zu kommen unter den genannten Lebensumständen und auch nicht wirklich willkommen geheißen zu werden in dem neuen Land ... Was meinst du welche psychischen oder psychosozialen Auswirkungen haben diese neuen Lebensumstände für die Menschen?

G: (6 Sek) also meine jetzt speziell auf Deutschland bezogen speziell auf diese Gruppe der Flüchtlinge die jetzt Ende der 90er da war (6 Sek) also psychische Auswirkungen würde ich sagen sind ... ja ((lachend)) meine Einschätzung ist da wirklich se:hr sehr negativ ... also ... weil (3 Sek) wenn man sich Trauma sich als sequentielle Traumatisierung als als ... Prozess anguckt dann ist ja die Phase nach der eigentlichen Bedrohung wo jemand Hilfe sucht und Hilfe erhofft sehr wichtig und dass man da auch ... quasi wieder ein Gefühl der Sicherheit ermöglicht und wenn das nicht geschieht wenn sich die Bedrohung dann sozusagen fortsetzt dann setzt sich auch der Traumatisierungsprozess fort und dann verlieren die Leute erst recht /ehm/ ein Gefühl von innerer ... von innerer Sicherheit und aus meiner Sicht hat diese ... diese sowohl soziale (3 Sek) prekäre Situation in Deutschland die die Sozialleistungen betrifft auch die

Unterbringung betrifft also die Unterbringung in den Heimen /ehm/ ja (2 Sek) die rechtliche Schwierigkeit überhaupt hierbleiben zu können das ist eine riesen Unsicherheit ... und wenn auf allen dieser Ebenen also was rechtlich /ehm/ ja Aufenthalt betrifft ja was rechtlich ihre Sozialleistung betreffen /ehm/ was überhaupt ihre Zukunftsperspektive betrifft und dann auch was Schulbildung und Kinder betrifft ja das ist so: eine Verunsicherung dass da dann natürlich auch innerhalb der Familien die Beziehungen wahnsinnig darunter leiden ... Also die ... diese Flüchtlingen werden quasi auch immer wieder re-traumatisiert ... es gab ja dann auch durch den Polizeiarzt Untersuchungen die feststellen sollten ob sie denn tatsächlich traumatisiert sind. Also es kam tatsächlich zur Infragestellung ihrer Erlebnisse wo sie sich se:hr sehr gedemütigt gefühlt haben wo sie wahnsinnige Ängste entwickelt haben und sich vorkamen wie in einem Verhör (2 Sek) und ich habe das ja miterlebt und wenn ich mir vorstelle was es da für Schwierigkeiten innerfamiliär gegeben haben muss ich war ja nicht in den Familien aber ich hab von Beziehungskonflikten erfahren also ... wenn die Männer dabei waren die kamen ja auch aus dem Krieg also ... das war so: schwierig das kann man sich gar nicht vorstellen das die Kinder total (2 Sek) darunter gelitten haben das muss ... auch sehr traumatisierend gewesen sein (3 Sek) also die Kinder mussten Ja:hre lang diese Situationen aushalten und die Eltern waren so sehr mit sich selbst beschäftigt das sie da sicherlich auch den entsprechenden Halt auch gar nicht geben konnten und darüber ob diese Kinder in den Schulen aufgefangen wurden bin ich mir auch nicht sicher ... ja gut Ende der 90er ... ja also es war glaub ich noch nicht gut genug institutionalisiert also so diese ... die Kompetenzen diesen Halt geben zu können ... aber natürlich gab es schon Integrationsklassen aber sonst gab es leider keine wirklich gute Zusammenarbeit zwischen den Beratungsstellen und den Schulen also (3 Sek) da hätte man ganz viel noch machen müssen um den Familien den richtigen Halt zu geben, aber man war so beschäftigt in den Beratungsstellen überhaupt die existenziellen Grundbedingungen abzusichern das man zu dem andern gar nicht kam

I: Also meinst du das es an der nicht wirklich vorhandenen Zusammenarbeit der verschiedenen Stellen daran scheiterte oder was muss deiner Meinung nach getan werden?

G: Ich glaub nicht (2 Sek) es ist einfach nur begrenzt was man da als Sozialarbeiter oder Projektmanager auch leisten kann ... also man war so sehr mit der akuten Betreuung der Familien beschäftigt das man vieles sonst vernachlässigt hat ... Menschenrechtsarbeit im Sinne von Verknüpfung mit politischer Ebene einfach um diesen Flüchtlingsschutz zu kämpfen wäre dieser Rahmen gegeben gewesen hätte man sich anders um die Familien kümmern können dann hätte man sie auch innerhalb der Gemeinde mehr Struktur finden können wo sie aufgenommen werden und auch Verbindungen mal in die Schule geht als Familie Hilfe beantragt ... sowas war ja gar nicht möglich

I: (7 Sek) Was fandest du denn aus deiner persönlichen Sichtweise vor welche Herausforderungen hat dich deine Arbeit mit Flüchtlingen immer gestellt? Also was waren besondere Herausforderungen in der Flüchtlingsarbeit im Vergleich zu anderen Tätigkeiten?

G: Ja mit diesem (6 Sek) mit diesem akuten Bedarf also mit dieser /ehm/ (6 Sek) diesen sich überhäufenden Probleme umzugehen ... also das muss man sich mal vorstellen da standen teilweise 20 Leute vor deiner Tür der Beratungsstelle um überhaupt ein Gespräch zu bekommen ja (2 Sek) so eine ganz (3 Sek) - und jeder hatte seine seine ... Probleme wo man irgendwie schon was beitragen konnte etwas zu unterstützen aber es war (5 Sek)

ja damit umzugehen zu sagen was kann man leisten und was kann man nicht leisten ... also diese Auseinandersetzung auch mit dem politischen Fragen und Umständen mit den eigenen Möglichkeiten das war sehr persönlich auch belastend weil man selbst ... weil man selbst eben auch eingeschränkt war ... es wurde quasi nicht das Problem der Flüchtlingspolitik wurde nicht politisch rechtlich gelöst sondern letztlich dann psychologisch und das ist ja dann ein Problem weil letztlich eben dann die Psychologen als diejenigen Stand halten mussten die zu beurteilen hatten ist der traumatisiert soll der da bleiben oder nicht? Und letztlich ist ja so eine Bewertung auf so einer Krankheitsebene eine ziemlich eingeschränkte Sicht ... man hätte ja alle sonstigen möglichen Faktoren auch hinzuziehen können wenn die Kinder gerade zum Beispiel in einer Ausbildung sind wo es gerade nicht sinnvoll ist das sie fortgesetzt werden also aber nicht an diesem einen Kriterium ist der traumatisiert oder nicht ... und entsprechend war ja auch der Druck auf diese Leute das sie traumatisiert sein müssen und es ihnen auch nicht besser gehen durfte ... also es hat ja alles nur noch verstärkt und verschlimmert wenn man sich den Traumaprozess anguckt ... also das Politikum des Trauma-Attests ist absolut absurd

I: Aber ist das dann überhaupt authentisch? Also ich stell mir vor ich bin ein Flüchtling und bin im besten Fall nicht traumatisiert und muss dann aber ein Attest vorweisen können das ich traumatisches erlebt habe ... da stelle ich mir einen unglaublichen [Druck vor

G: Ja] und dann vor allem die Schuld anderen gegenüber die vielleicht vergewaltigt wurden oder den schlimme Dinge wiederfahren sind ... das ist unglaublich schwierig für die Beteiligten und für uns natürlich auch ... und letztlich hat ... also die Menschenrechtsarbeit wurde ja gemacht auch mit dem psychologischen Argument das man die Leute schützen muss ... zurecht ... ((kopfschüttelnd)) aber dann ist es als wäre das Beil wieder hier und wieder zurückgefallen auf die Therapeuten und Psychologen weil sie es dann ausbaden mussten ... also es war eine absurde Situation ... und das mit dem Attest ist auch weiterhin aktuell immer noch so aber es ist halt nicht mehr ... also es gibt ja rechtlich gesehen diese /ehm/ Unterscheidung zwischen Kontingentflüchtling und oder ob du jetzt ein Asylverfahren willst ... also Kontingentverfahren ist eine Sonderregelung für Länder die im Krieg sind ... und letztlich ist für diese Regelung wohl wurde da per Gesetz festgeschrieben das die traumatisiert sein müssen um die Aufenthaltsbefugnis zu bekommen (3 Sek) also sie müssen nachweisen das sie diese Diagnose bekommen haben ... es geht immer um diese Frage vom Schutz um Leib und Leben es wird gefragt ob Flüchtlinge aufgrund ihres Traumas in Behandlung sind ob eine Rückführung für sie retraumatisierend wäre ob sie womöglich suizidgefährdet sind und dann diesen Schutz bekommen ... das heißt nicht das sie dann nicht abgeschoben werden oder das sie eine Aufenthaltsbefugnis bekommen oder das sie nicht abgeschoben werden dürfen ... und da wird diese Trauma-Attestierung noch weiter gemacht ... also die psychosozialen Zentren haben sich genau darauf spezialisiert auf das Ausstellen dieses Gutachtens und dieser Stellungnahmen das hat sich aber inzwischen sag ich mal normalisiert aber ist immer noch Bestandteil im Prozess ... nicht mehr so dominant aber in den Einzelfällen wo es um Abschiebeschutz geht schon da spielt es immer noch eine ganz große Rolle das dann das Attest vorliegen muss

I: Steht denn da Kindern und Jugendlichen ein besonderer Schutz zu? Also nehmen wir Fälle von unbegleiteten Flüchtlingskindern muss da dann auch attestiert werden das die schwer traumatisiert sind oder gibt es da gesonderte Regelungen?

G: Bei Kindern und Jugendlichen weiß ich das jetzt gar nicht genau wie das ist mit gesonderten Regelungen aber das müsste dann eigentlich auch so für die zutreffen ...

also aber klar da kommen nochmal andere Schutzfaktoren hinzu vielleicht die man dann zusätzlich berücksichtigen muss so rechtlich gesehen

I: Zum Beispiel?

G: Zum Beispiel ... zum Beispiel was der Flüchtling vor Ort ... was der ... für Dinge erlebt hat und Fragen zur Herkunft und zum Herkunftsland ... ob die Eltern auffindbar sind ... es handelt sich ja um andere Grundbedingungen als wenn die Eltern beispielsweise verstorben sind

I: Aber das ist ja wahrscheinlich auch nicht immer so leicht herauszufinden insbesondere wenn es sich um Flüchtlinge ohne Dokumente handelt oder?

G: Oder wenn es Institutionen gibt die Kinder vor Ort helfen

I: Ja was haben denn Kinder und Jugendliche eigentlich in Deutschland für Kontaktstellen?

G: Es gibt ganz speziell Zentren die sich mit unbegleiteten Flüchtlingskindern beschäftigen die machen viel auch so Jugendprojekte wo es dann vor allem auch um kulturelle Dinge geht also abgesehen von den Aufenthaltsrechtlichen Geschichten ... also Minderjährige müssen ja auch erstmal zumindest bis sie 18 sind keinen Asylantrag stellen so lange können sie hier bleiben aber von den Netzwerken also es gibt ja zum Beispiel den Berliner Flüchtlingsrat da gibt es so eine ganze Liste mit den unterschiedlichsten Institutionen (2 Sek) also das sind ganz gut zusammengestellte Kontakte und Adressenliste und da sieht man dann auch ganz genau welche Institution für unbegleitete Flüchtlinge zuständig sind ... und der Flüchtlingsrat ist ja auch bundesweit organisiert also da hat dann jedes Bundesland seinen Flüchtlingsrat und entsprechend wenn du dann was suchst zu unbegleiteten Flüchtlingen hast du dann deine Linkliste

I: Wie steht es denn eigentlich abgesehen von den doch sehr speziellen Einrichtungen um die Integration von jungen Flüchtlingen oder auch deren Eltern in der Gesellschaft? Also wieder Thema Arbeit Schule Freizeit ... werden ihnen da ehrliche Möglichkeiten geboten und ist die Integration überhaupt erwünscht?

G: Also das ist auch sehr unterschiedlich in den Bundesländern weil je nachdem wie sie welchen Regelungen unterworfen sind wohnen sie halt beispielsweise in den Gemeinschaftsunterkünften oder Wohnheimen oder Lagern /ehm/ und da gibt es dann vielleicht irgendwelche politischen Initiativen wo dann mal jemand zu Besuch hingeht aber es ist jetzt kein direkter Kontakt in der Bevölkerung /ehm/ oder es gibt auch Bundesländer wo sie dann ihre eigene Wohnung haben und wo sie dann eben auch wie andere zur Nachbarschaft dazu gehören also und deshalb ist natürlich die Frage der Integration in den Ländern immer eine grundlegend andere ... je nachdem wie sie eben gesetzlich geregelt ist aber es gibt jetzt zum Beispiel in Schulen oder in Kindergärten häufig Integrationsprojekte und es gibt da auch speziell für Flüchtlinge Projekte das sind aber meistens Einzelinitiativen ... ich kann das gar nicht so grundlegend sagen

I: Wie hast du denn zu der Zeit als du noch mit Flüchtlingen gearbeitet hast die Situation wahrgenommen wie gewünscht diese Projekte sind beziehungsweise wie gewünscht Integration ist?

G: Zu dieser Zeit ging es ja noch gar nicht um Integration von den Flüchtlingen sondern um Abschiebung und entsprechend gab es natürlich auch keine Gelder für Integrationsprojekte ... so diese Debatte um Integration und um Förderung die kam ja eigentlich erst mit dem Zuwanderungsgesetz auf also das Ausländergesetz wurde ja dann zum Zuwanderungsgesetz wenn ich das alles richtig in Erinnerung habe und damit hat sich dann auch erst so ein Stück weit die Debatte verändert und auch das politische Bewusstsein ... zum positiven weil es eben mehr um Zuwanderung ging und weniger um Abschiebung und plötzlich Einwanderung als etwas verstanden wurde wo man auch ökonomisch von profitieren kann also das es eben auch Zuwanderung von gut ausgebildeten Fachkräften gibt ... vor allem daraus entstanden dann tolle Integrationsprojekte und man hat versucht in öffentlichen Einrichtungen wie den Arbeitsämtern auch umzudenken und mittlerweile gibt es ja auch auf EU Ebene- also EU geförderte Projekte aber da geht es ja auch nicht mehr nur um Flüchtlinge sondern auch um europäische Migration ... aber immer noch ist dieses Thema der Integration natürlich so komplex weil es da so viele verschiedene Strömungen gibt

I: Welche Perspektiven hat denn ein Flüchtlingskind oder ein –jugendlicher hier in Deutschland? Die wissen ja wahrscheinlich auch das sie nur auf bestimmte Zeit hier sind ...

G: (7 Sek) Also wenn die in die Schule kommen und die Schule Möglichkeiten bietet altersübergreifendes Lernen bereitzustellen und ihnen die Chance ermöglicht wird auch selbst etwas in den Unterricht an Wissen mitzubringen oder die Schulen versuchen diese Kinder auch aufzufangen an Schwierigkeiten und wenn sie da quasi auch einen Halt bekommen in der Schule oder über Lehrer Freunde oder auch Sozialarbeiter dann kann das durchaus auch eine sehr entlastende Funktion für die Kinder bieten und haltgebend sein wenn sie das Gefühl bekommen das sie da sein können und nicht morgen abgeschoben werden ... also wenn die Kinder tagtäglich die Angst der Eltern spüren dass die Polizei gleich vor der Tür steht und es kann ja durchaus auch sein das sie das sogar real erlebt haben das irgendwer aus der Familie abgeholt wird dann ist das so eine Angst das natürlich dann auch nicht so eine Schule auffangen kann aber wenn sie erstmal das Gefühl haben sie können jetzt hier sein dann denke ich haben sie durchaus auch die Möglichkeit sich Perspektiven aufzubauen ... und manche lernen sehr schnell die Sprache und finden sich wahnsinnig schnell hier zurecht ...

I: Nur dann müssen sie eben irgendwann wieder weggehen ...

G: Ja das ist eben die Schwierigkeit ... oder das die Jugendlichen dann in dem Alter sind wo sie vielleicht sagen ich möchte hier bleiben und studieren ich habe mein deutsches Abitur gemacht ...

I: Ja das stelle ich mir immer am schlimmsten vor die Fälle von Flüchtlingen die eben als Kleinkinder hierher kommen und dann in ein vollkommen fremdes Land zurückgehen müssen

G: Ja und da haben dann aber auch eben diese Beratungsstellen die sich auf Jugendliche spezialisieren auch die Möglichkeit zu gucken wie geholfen werden kann ... beispielsweise über eine Studienplatzsuche und darüber die Aufenthaltsgenehmigung also solche Möglichkeiten gibt es ja dann auch eben individuell zu gucken was kann man machen, dass sie hier bleiben können oder das man Kontakt hält zu ihnen und sich

eventuell die Chance bietet das sie zurückkommen können nach Deutschland ... aber auch da gibt es bundeslandabhängig spezielle Regelungen

I: Da frage ich mich aber auch wie groß denn bei diesen Jugendlichen oder auch deren Eltern die Motivation ist also selber auch diese Integration zu wollen zum Beispiel eben die Sprache zu lernen

G: Also was so ein ganz interessantes Phänomen war so Beobachtungen auch über die wir uns auch im Team ausgetauscht haben das die Mädchen sehr oft sehr fleißig sind und sehr gut in der Schule waren und auch so die Eltern unterstützt haben zum Arzt gehen und übersetzt haben und die Jungen eher sowas rebellierendes entwickelt haben sowas aggressives ... und wir uns dann überlegt haben ob es nicht auch mit der Möglichkeit zusammenhängt hier für viele Frauen Mütter und auch Mädchen ist sich hier selbstbewusster zu bewegen ... ja das es eben Frauen auch gut tun kann das sie hier auch andere Hierarchien erleben je nachdem aus welchen Ländern sie kommen ... und die Väter und Jungs eben in ihrer Lebensweise und ihrer Identität als Mann nicht mehr ihren Platz finden und die Jungs dann auch nicht so richtig ihren Platz finden ... also man ist ja in Gefahr also von erzwungener Migration spricht man das es etwas belastendes also psychisch belastendes hat aber es kann eben auch sehr befreiend sein ... diese Veränderung kann ja eben auch ganz neuen Gestaltungsraum bieten wo Leute die auch aus ganz schwierigen Lebensverhältnissen kommen diese Erfahrungen auch für sich zu nutzen lernen. Und das scheint aber oft für Frauen vielleicht dann leichter zu sein als für Männer (2 Sek) also das ist nur so eine Beobachtung also das kann ich jetzt nicht mit irgendwelchen Studienergebnissen oder so unterlegen ...

I: Vorhin hattest du ja ganz viel über die therapeutischen Ansätze gesprochen die bisher verwendet wurden ... wurden denn da spezielle Therapieformen verwendet und von wem wurden die durchgeführt? Gab es ein bestimmtes Ziel also ging es ausschließlich darum dieses Attest zu bekommen oder wollte man tatsächlich auch helfen?

G: Also es gibt ja in der Trauma-Therapie drei Phasen ... also so einmal die Stabilisierung wo es um das Arbeitsbündnis geht so um das Gefühl Sicherheit wiederzuerlangen mit anderen und bei sich selbst und dann eine Trauma-Exposition wo es dann um das durcharbeiten geht und dann in der dritten Phase die Integration des Traumas in die Lebensgeschichte und in die Lebensgestaltung ... also das das Trauma nicht mehr so dominierend ist sondern das man kognitiv es auch emotional besser kontrollieren kann im Alltag ... und wir Therapeuten haben dann gesehen das so lang diese Menschen nicht einen sicheren Aufenthalt haben kann man nur in der ersten Phase arbeiten ... es geht da noch nicht um Trauma-Exposition sondern tatsächlich nur um das nötigste um eben diese Atteste zu schreiben ... also es ging nicht um die Vergangenheit sondern der Fokus war stärker auf die Gegenwart ... alles was die Sicherheit im Hier und Jetzt betrifft aber es gab in den Gesprächen natürlich auch immer Rückbezüge wo es dann natürlich auch wichtig war zu gucken was sie hier stabilisiert woher kamen sie was ist eigentlich passiert also auch schon eine Rekonstruktion gemeinsam zu machen aber weniger im Sinne einer Trauma-Exposition im eigentlichen Sinn ...

I: Gibt es sonst denn deiner Meinung nach noch Alternativen im therapeutischen Bereich bei der Arbeit mit Flüchtlingen?

G: ((lächelnd)) Ganz viele... also bestimmt gibt es da ganz viele ganz tolle Möglichkeiten ... man muss nicht speziell therapeutisch arbeiten um die Leute... um ihnen dieses Gefühl

der Sicherheit wieder herzustellen daher denke ich das es da sehr gute kreative Ansätze geben kann ... und wie die Friedenszirkel handelt es sich um Ansätze die sehr schön und auch sehr wichtig sind wenn man so viel Gewalt erfahren hat und an einen neuen Ort kommt dann ist es etwas wunderbares wenn man das Gefühl bekommen kann wieder Teil der Bevölkerung und Teil einer Gruppe zu sein ... dieses Zugehörigkeitsgefühl zu entwickeln und den Austausch mit anderen zu fördern ist etwas ganz Grundlegendes für jeden Menschen das kann sowohl über die therapeutische Arbeit gelingen als aber auch über andere Wege (2 Sek) es ist schön zu beobachten das Menschen im Austausch bei organisierten Treffen beispielsweise von Eltern in Kitas auch Gemeinsamkeiten finden und feststellen das man gemeinsame Schnittpunkte hat ... ich finde das das etwas sehr wichtiges ist ob Gemeinde Kirche Sportvereine

I: (4 Sek) Was hältst du denn von dem Konzept der Friedenszirkel?

G: Ja: ... ich halte es für spannend weil es um Kommunikation und Austausch geht und spannend weil untersch-... weil wenn es um das Kind geht weil da die Möglichkeit besteht- also gerade bei Flüchtlingskindern ist die Funktion der Lehrer oder Trainer im Sportverein ist ganz ganz wichtig weil der hat ja seine Verwandtschaft nicht um sich herum ... oder hat auch viele Bezüge verloren die mit seiner Herkunft zu tun haben dementsprechend bedeutungsvoller werden diese Figuren um ihn herum oder auch die Orte um ihn herum ... und wenn die einbezogen werden in in in Prozesse welche auch immer eine Aushandlung von weiß ich nicht dann ist es wichtig für das Kind und auch stützend wenn er da positive Verbindung hat und diese Verbindung dadurch gestärkt werden können ... und letztlich ist bei diesen Kindern ja auch immer die Frage wie kann Erinnerung möglich gemacht werden ... wie kann über das was passiert ist gesprochen werden (3 Sek) und innerhalb der Familien ist es oft schwierig weil angenommen die Mutter wurde vergewaltigt oder der Vater hat im Krieg Menschen umgebracht dann ist das ein Tabu in der Familie und dann wird zum Teil auch gar nicht über die Erlebnisse im Krieg gesprochen oder auch wie es früher war dann zum Teil verherrlicht und dadurch entsteht natürlich so ein ganz einseitiges Bild von der Vergangenheit und Herkunft ... und es ist daher natürlich wahnsinnig interessant wenn auch mal andere Figuren dabei sind die ein etwas differenzierteres Bild ermöglichen

I: Was für Konstellationen wären denn deiner Meinung nach möglich bei einem Friedenszirkel mit Flüchtlingen und welches Ziel könnte solch ein Zirkel haben?

G: Ja: das ist eben so ein bisschen die Schwierigkeit weil ich denke das Friedenszirkel einen klaren Auftrag brauchen also angenommen das Kind ist irgendwie ... oder hat in der Schule Konflikte mit einem anderen Kind und das dann die unterschiedlichen Parteien zusammen kommen also nicht nur Kind und Kind sondern dass auch die Möglichkeit bestünde die Eltern mit an den Tisch zu holen also einfach wichtige Bezugspersonen aus dem Umfeld der Kinder und dann würde es zu einem Gespräch kommen das über den in Relation gesehenen Mini-Konflikt hinausgehen würde und stattdessen zu einem Austausch wer man ist und woher man kommt und andere Herausforderungen die den Kindern und dem Umfeld gar nicht so bewusst waren die aber den Konflikt vorantreiben und eventuell sogar verursachen ... so etwas fände ich sehr hilfreich und spannend stell mir es aber schwierig vor das die Beteiligten da auch sich dafür engagieren

I: Was denkst du denn wäre so ein Zirkel-Szenario innerhalb der Familie denkbar gerade in Fällen von häuslicher Gewalt oder vorhin angesprochene Beziehungsprobleme ... könnten Zirkel innerhalb der Familie helfen?

G: (10 Sek) Ja es ist /ehm/ immer die Frage von welchem Fall man ausgeht also ich könnte mir schon vorstellen das ... was ich vorhin auch sagte wenn das Kind durch die Flucht hierhin kommt hat es bestimmte Pfeiler verloren die vielleicht früher Sicherheit gegeben haben wenn es also neue Personen gibt die dem Kind Halt bieten können dann ist es ganz wichtig und sehr stabilisierend für das Kind und letztlich gilt natürlich das gleiche wenn es einen Konflikt in der Familie gibt (4 Sek) wo die Familie selbst vielleicht weniger Möglichkeiten hat diesen Konflikt für sich zu bewältigen das es dann eine Möglichkeit gibt mit den entsprechenden Bezugspersonen die zusammenzubringen. Aber da ist wiederum die Frage welche...also ich stell mir das so schwierig vor weil die Erwachsenen haben ja vielleicht einen Nachbarn oder (8 Sek)

I: Stellst du dir so einen Zirkel generell schwierig vor oder jetzt insbesondere in den Fällen wo es um Flüchtlinge geht weil vielleicht nicht genug Kontakte und Bezugspersonen im neuen Land haben?

G: Also sowas also- angenommen Flüchtlinge hoffe ich haben in der Regel Anbindungen zu Einrichtungen weil sie ja Unterstützung brauchen und eigentlich müsste so etwas ja über diese Einrichtungen der Familienhilfe oder so möglich sein das man verschiedene Leute an einen Tisch bring ja ... die sich dann gemeinsam mit diesem Familienkonflikt auseinandersetzen ... und da frage ich mich braucht es da so ein Konzept oder wird das nicht sowieso gemacht im Einzelfall welche Bezugspersonen gibt es und so weiter (2 Sek) also bei so einem Konzept wie dem der Friedenszirkel könnte man nochmal bekräftigen das es durchaus Sinn macht da auch andere mit einzubeziehen ... ja das der Konflikt quasi nicht nur zwischen den beiden Konfliktparteien ausgetragen wird sondern dadurch auch klar wird das es sich eben um einen gemeinschaftlichen oder gesellschaftlichen Konflikt handelt (2 Sek) wenn zum Beispiel ein Lehrer mit dabei ist wo es dann klar ist es geht nicht nur um Mutter Vater die darunter leiden aber dann besteht eben wieder die Gefahr das es auf der einen Seite die Helfer gibt und auf der anderen Seite so die Betroffenen das hat ich ja nicht so das Gefühl das das das Konzept von den Friedenszirkeln ist sondern dass es eher zu einem Austausch kommt

I: Ich hör da so ein bisschen Skepsis bei dir raus bezüglich der Zirkel ...wo siehst du denn die Grenzen der Zirkel von dem was du über sie weißt?

G: Das sie...- ja die Form der Institutionalisierung find ich schwierig weil es eben unterschiedlichste Modelle des Austauschs schon gibt ja wie du auch sagst im Justizbereich und Familienhilfe und da dann die Frage wenn Bezugspersonen wie Lehrer und so weiter zu den Treffen eingeladen werden handelt es sich ja in irgendeiner Form um professionelle oder Experten in ihrem Bereich und da stell ich mir die Frage wie groß die Bereitschaft ist ... also würden sie sich freiwillig unter- beziehungsweise einordnen? Das sind ja Leute die viele Familien und Kinder betreuen die ja zum Teil auch gar nicht die Kapazität haben daran teilzunehmen

I: Und spezifischer zu Flüchtlingen siehst du da nochmal Herausforderungen? Irgendwelche Aspekte zum Beispiel von denen du denkst das sie von den Zirkeln nicht erfasst werden könnten oder zu sensibel sind von der Thematik her?

G: Eigentlich habe ich eher das Gefühl bei den Flüchtlingen da könnte ich mir das schon eher vorstellen weil es da auch um einen Erfahrungsaustausch geht wo viele zum Beispiel Lehrer oder Eltern von Klassenkameraden gar nichts drüber wissen ... über über über sage ich mal die Lebenslage oder auch woher die Kinder und ihre Familien kommen ...

das wäre dann quasi nicht so konfliktbezogen sondern es würde eher um einen Austausch gehen wo dann auch alle ein Stück von profitieren können (7 Sek)

I: Im Fall dass diese Zirkel ein guter Ansatz wären bei Flüchtlingen wo wäre es denn wünschenswert wo sollten die Zirkel anpacken wo andere Ansätze eventuell scheitern? Und was hältst du vor allem auch für realistisch was mit ihnen erreicht werden könnte?

G: /Ehm/ wenn man jetzt ... also so wie ich die Zirkel verstanden habe gibt es einen bestimmten Auftrag oder ein Problem ein Konflikt ... und daraufhin kommen dann die Leute zusammen und und für sinnvoll halte ich tatsächlich diese Zirkel in den Institutionen zu etablieren die sowieso mit den Leuten Kontakt haben wie die Kita wie Schulen ja? Oder wie auch am Arbeitsplatz wenn da ein Arbeitgeber ein Problem hat mit einem Angestellten der als Flüchtling nach Deutschland gekommen ist dann steht man eben oft vor der Herausforderung das man ein Problem hat aber gar nicht weiß wie man damit umgehen soll ... da spielen insbesondere kulturelle Faktoren oft auch eine große Rolle ... und da finde ich es sehr sinnvoll und förderlich sowohl Gleichgesinnte als auch Menschen unterschiedlicher Herkunft und mit unterschiedlichen persönlichen Hintergründen zusammen zu bringen und einen Austausch zu ermöglichen auch im Sinne also ... /ehm/... für das Opfer den Hilflosen da Unterstützung zu bekommen und insbesondere dass man eben in der Gegenwart eher ansetzt und sich mit Bedingungen und Problemen der Gegenwart konfrontiert ...

I: Wann würdest du von einem Trauma bei Flüchtlingen sprechen? Gibt es da spezielle Symptome oder ist lässt sich das bei gesonderten Gruppen, wie den Flüchtlingen nicht spezifizieren?

G: Ich würde, wenn ich den Begriff Trauma oder traumatisiert verwende dann hat das immer eine spezielle Funktion ... da ist dann ein traumatisierter Flüchtling jemand der ... oder da benutze ich traumatisiert weil es rechtlich vorgegeben ist eine bestimmte formale Regelung ist (2 Sek) ob ich dann den für traumatisiert halte oder nicht ist ja nochmal was anderes und zu meiner Einschätzung über die Traumatisierung von Menschen die die Fälle ich jetzt nicht anhand der Symptome die jetzt nach PTSD vorliegen der Kriterien ... also da habe ich jetzt sage ich mal ein offeneres Verständnis von Trauma also das ist auch nicht nur auf Flüchtlinge bezogen (3 Sek) oft weiß man gar nicht das man traumatisiert ist oft ist es auch gar nicht sichtbar durch Symptome man muss einfach in dem Moment gucken handelt es sich um ein Trauma wenn es denn eine Wirkung hatte die weitere Entwicklung des Kindes die sich so psychisch eingeprägt hat dass derjenige A darunter leidet und B es aber gleichzeitig auch so etwas unbewusstes ist ... gerade wenn man merkt das die Personen Umstände und Situationen nicht so für sich kontrollieren kann wie er es gerne will ... man kann einfach gucken was für Kompensationsstrategien entwickelt derjenige daraus können auch ganz positive Ressourcen entstehen ... Vor allem das Erlebnis im Zirkel stelle ich mir für Kinder als einen Moment vor an dem sie beteiligt werden in dem sie Expertise bieten können und vor allem Anerkennung bekommen ... ein Erfolgsmoment quasi in dem es um sie geht aber auch andere Themen mit einbettet

I: Gibt es deiner Meinung nach sonst noch gute Alternativen bei der Arbeit mit Flüchtlingen ... also grad im therapeutischen Bereich?

G: (3 Sek) Ganz viele also bestimmt gibt es da ganz viele ganze tolle Möglichkeiten also man muss nicht unbedingt therapeutisch arbeiten um ein Gefühl der Sicherheit wieder

herzustellen ich denke da gibt es ganz viele wahnsinnig kreative Ansätze ... Und weil du ja da vorhin- und weil du ja da vorhin vorhin von den Peace-Zirkeln gesprochen hast das ist etwas das schön und wichtig ist das man wenn man so: viel Gewalt erfahren hat und an einen neuen Ort kommt das man das Gefühl haben kann das man wieder Teil der Bevölkerung und Teil einer Gruppe ist ein Zugehörigkeitsgefühl zu entwickeln wobei wichtig vor allem ist ... ja dieser Austausch untereinander und das ist etwas das ich finde was ganz grundlegend ist und kann sowohl über die therapeutische Arbeit erfolgen als auch über andere Dinge ... ja ... Elterncafe wo die Eltern eingeladen werden wo sie eine Gemeinsamkeit finden das ist ja auch ganz wichtig über eine Gemeinde in der Kirche oder Sportvereine oder wie auch immer

I: Ja das ist wahr der Zirkel funktioniert nur bei freiwilliger Teilnahme und durch die Bereitschaft sich auf irgendeine Weise aktiv einzubringen (5 Sek)

G: Nichtsdestotrotz ... also ich mein der Ansatz der Zirkel ... ich finde ihn großartig und wahnsinnig nützlich insbesondere bei der Arbeit mit Flüchtlingen

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